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BY THE SAME AUTHOR

IRISH IDYLLS

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LONDON: HODDER AND STOUGHTON

BOG-LAND STUDIES

BOG-LAND STUDIES

BY

J. BARLOW

THIRD EDITION

LONDON

HODDER AND STOUGHTON

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TH' OULD MASTER

Πῇ δ'ἐθέλεις ἰέναι πολλὴν ἐπὶ γαῖαν
Μοῦνος ἐὼν ἀγαπητός ;

TH' OULD MASTER

I

It mayn't be so much of a place whin ye reckon by land—Inish Fay—
Just a thrifle o' fields and a bog like; but if ye considher the say,
Sure we've lashins an' lavins o' that, spreadin' out and away like a floor
To Ratheen at the end of our bay, that's as far as ye'll look from your door,
An' that far ye'd scarce look in a week to the west, where there isn't, I'm tould,
One dhry step 'twixt yer fut an' the States; sartin 'tis the long waves do come rowled

Same as if they 'd set out from the back o' beyant
an' was thryin' how each
Could swell up to the sizeablest bigness afore it
lapt o'er on the beach.
Ay, we 've plenty enough o' the say, an' good luck
to 't ; I don't understand
How the folk keep contínted at all that be settled
far up on the land,
Out o' reach o' the tides ; 'tis like livin' wid never
a chance to be spied,
And what use is one's life widout chances ? Ye 've
always a chance wid the tide ;
For ye never can tell what 'twill take in its head
to sthrew round on the shore ;
Maybe dhrift-wood, or grand bits o' boards, that
comes handy for splicin' an oar ;
Or a crab skytin' back o'er the shine o' the wet—
sure, whatever ye 've found,
It 's a sort o' diversion thim whiles when ye 're
starvin' an' sthreelin' around.

II

I 'd be noways denyin' the say 's done ill turns
on us now and agin ;
But our bit of an Inish, begorrah, I 'll stan' by
thro' thick an' thro' thin,
For the pleasant ould times we 've had on it is
more than I 'll ever forget,
And except for th' ould master's misfortins, belike
we 'd be havin' thim yet.
There was none lived contínteder ; he in the Big
House that 's screened from the wind
Up the hollow, an' ourselves by the shore wid the
bank lanin' over behind,
An' the say washin' up to the doors, an' the sod
runnin' down to our boats,
Where along o' the weed-dhrifts an' shells there 'd
be grazin' most whiles for the goats ;

And our pratie-dhrills yonder—ochone, not the heart-scalds they 've been to us since,

For it 's bare-fut th' ould master 'd ha' walked ere he 'd ask for a poor body's pince,

If so happen—an' ready enough 'tis to happen—a bad saison came.

He was *that* sort, and young Misther Denis, God rest of his soul, was the same.

III

Yet 'twas just be the raison of him, Misther Denis, the throuble began.

For afore ye 'd believe he shot up from a slip of a boy to a man ;

Not his match in the counthry, sez we ; an' th' ould master he thought that the lad

Bet creation, because, ye percaive, it was all o' the childher he had,

An' the misthress had died on thim both. So 'twas rael bad luck to befall

When young master tuk into his head to be off and away from us all,

An' to make of his fortin in 'Sthralia. Och, sure he'd one made fit an' fine,

But some money they owned, I 've heard said, had got all swallied up in a mine,

An' that gave him the notion ; an' thin there 's the world young chaps fancy to see.

So th' ould master was fairly disthracted, an' couldn't abide the idee.

And he done all he could to pervint of his goin' an' coax him to stay,

For he got him the natest half-decker that ever was sailed in our bay,

An' for huntin' a mare that 'ud frighten the Saints wid the leps that she 'd lep,

A grand baste—but no ha'porth o' use ; Misther Denis he wouldn't be kep',

An' the sorra a thing good or bad 'ud persuade
him to bide here contint,
For he 'd clane set his heart upon goin'. An' so
one fine mornin' he wint.

IV

And we missed him, faith, little an' big, but th'
ould master he missed him the worst,
It 's a full ten year oulder he looked from that day.
Howsomedever, at first
We thried puttin' the best face we could on the
matter, an' talkin' a dale
Of how soon he 'd be wid us agin ; an' thin letters
'ud come by the mail
Wid discripshins of all Misther Denis was seein'
an' doin' out there,
An' that cheered him up finely ; an' whiles he 'd
step down where the most of us were,

When we'd sit on the pier afther work, an' 'ud
read us out bits of his news
From Austhraly; an' thin we'd get gabbin'
together like say-gulls an' mews
Whin they're fishin' an' fightin', of all Misther
Denis 'ud do out of han'
Once he come home as rich as a Jew; the good
stock that he'd put on the lan',
An' the fields he'd be dhrainin'; bedad, we'd the
whole of it settled an' planned,
To the names o' the cows, an' which side o' the
yard the new cart-shed 'ud stand.
Why, one night young Pat Byrne an' Joe Murphy
they set to an' boxed up an' down
About which o' thim both'd get the job to look
afther the greyhounds he'd own—
For we knew Misther Denis 'd be sartin to keep
an odd few in the place—
An' th' ould master seemed rael diverted, an' gave
thim a shillin' apiece.

V

But thin, it was maybe a couple o' twelve-
months from whin he set out,
We began to misdoubt some bad luck, till at last
we done worse than misdoubt,
For the throuble crep' closer each day; so I 've
watched a fog dhrift up the shore
Wipin' out one by one every field glintin' green in
the sun just before.
An' to my mind that throuble's the worst, whin
the time keeps jog-throttin' along,
An' because nothin' happens at all, ye get certiner
somethin's gone wrong.
For if grief's to befall ye, I 'd liefer 'twould lape
on ye suddint when laste
Ye expect, an' grip hould o' your heart like some
nathural sort o' wild baste,

Than come slitherin' by like a snake, an' be prickin' your fut wid its sting
That 'ill send the death crawlin' in could thro' your limbs. But 'twas just such a thing
Wid the young master's letters. For, first time one missed, all we said was the post
Had delayed it belike; an' next mail-day we said one might aisy be lost
Comin' that far; an' time an' agin we'd be sayin': 'Och, musha, if aught
Would ha' happint him, some one'd ha' wrote fast enough wid the news'; but we thought
It was quare. Till at last we were dhruv to believe that he'd surely been tuk
Wid some fever, or met wid a hurt, and be thravellin' far off, be bad luck,
And had died all alone, wid the sorra a friend to be sendin' home word;
Or what else was the raison that year afther year tale nor tidings we heard?

VI

But it come cruel hard on th' ould master, for, livin' so lonesome an' quite,
He 'd got naught to be takin' his mind off the throuble by day or by night.
An' he wouldn't let on he thought bad o' the matter; an' yet all the same,
He 'd be off wid himself in the boat to the town every mornin' that came,
Like enough wid no chance in the world o' the mail bein' in, as he knew;
But he 'd set Widdy Doyle at the office a-sortin' the letter-bags thro',
An' stan' watchin' as if one 'ud make all the differ 'twixt Heaven and Hell;
An' it never was Heaven; for always there 'd be the same story to tell:

'No, there's nought for your Honor this day.'
An' he stopped himself goin' at last,
And 'ud send the boys over, but, och, ere ye'd
think they'd ha' fairly got past
Inish Greine, half ways back, he'd be thrampin'
the pier lookin' out for the boat,
In a down-pour, mayhap, wid the win' fit to
blusther the nap off his coat;
An' 'twas: 'Sorra a thing for your Honor.'—
Ochone, every sowl in the place
Would be heart-vexed to see him creep home be
himself wid that news in his face.

VII

Sure, 'tis waitin' an' hopin' that keep ye tormented. It's aisy to say:
'Och, I'll put the thoughts out o' me head; I'll
not hope it no more from this day';

But next minute, the same as a spark that ye
think ye've throd under your heel,
It flares up, an' flares out, an', begorrah, it laves
you a desolit feel.
I remember one day we made sure there was
news, for the boat we espied
Wid the boys rowin' mad, fit to reave the ould
thole-pins clear out of her side,
An' Long Mick, the big fool, lettin' bawls in the
bows, and a-wavin' the bag,
'Cause a velopy 'd come wid a sthrange-coloured
stamp, an' they 'd settled to brag
'Twas from 'Sthralia. An', there, when th' ould
master had tore it wid his hands all a-shake,
It was merely some blathers in print o' the fortins
a body could make
On the railroads in France; an' that mornin' there
wasn't a word of abuse
That we didn't be givin' the omadhaun Mick—
but, sure, where was the use?

So the years slipt away an' away, an' no news to be had good or ill;
But it 's more than the years, I 'll go bail, did be dhrivin' th' ould master down-hill;
'Twas the wond'rin', an' wishin', an' frettin' that whitened the hair on his head,
When 'twas black as a crow, an' that stooped him, when sthraight as a soldier he 'd tread.

VIII

An' the last time he ever come down on the beach was a dhreary wild day
In the could heart o' March, whin the win' keeps a keen like a dog gone asthray,
An' the sun 'ill let on to be shinin' wid no taste of heat in it yet,
An' the world seems swep' empty an' waitin' for somethin' it never 'ill get.

So th' ould master come mopin' along where me boat was heeled up on the sands,
An' sat down wid his hands on the top of his stick, an' his chin on his hands;
Och, it 's feeble, an' fretted, an' lonesome he looked as he stared o'er the gleam
O' the say; an' sez he to me: 'Connor, I 'm thinkin' th' ould Inish 'ill seem
Quare enough whin there 's ne'er an O'Neil on 't, an' we afther ownin' it all
For these hundrids o' years.' An': 'Yer Honor,' sez I, 'that 's not like to befall
In these hundrids o' years comin' by.' But sez he wid a shake of his head:
'Troth, 'twill happen as soon as I quit; for since he—they 've no hope but he 's dead—
To the sorra an O'Neil Inish Fay 's bound to go; 'tis me uncle's son's son,
That lives over the wather. He 'd plenty, he 'd plenty—an' I 'd but the one.

Little news I 've e'er heard o' thim all, an' that
little no good. I misdoubt
He 'll be playin' the Divil's game here, an' be
turnin' me poor people out:
Sure ye 'll mind Misther Denis 'd ha' ne'er thried
that trade? He *would* go, man, would go—
But in troth it 's hard lines on yous all.' An' sez
I to meself: 'It is so;
It 's hard lines ne'er to know from one day to the
other who 'll be ownin' ye next,
Whether folks that be kind-like an' wait or a
grabbin' ould naygur that 's vext
Till he 's got the thatch burnt o'er your head, an'
the walls battered down round your hearth;
'Tis the same as if God an' the Divil tuk turns
to be ownin' the earth';
So thinks I to meself. But, och musha, who 'd
go to be sayin' a word
Might disthress the poor master thim times?
And sez I: 'Wid the help o' the Lord,

Div'l a sowl save your Honor's own self'll get the chance to be thratin' us hard
For this great while. An' happen your Honor'd step round now by Gallaher's yard,
For his pigs is a sight to behold.' An' sez he: 'Well, to-morrow I might—
But to-day—it's 'most time I turned home.' The Saints shield him, 'twas clear as the light
That he hadn't the heart to be carin' for aught 'neath the sun, here or there.
An' he off wid him home to his big empty house; an' to-morrow came ne'er.

IX

Howsomedever, afore very long, oft enough one 'ud say to oneself
'Twas belike better luck afther all that th' ould master was laid on the shelf,

Than to have him about and around gettin' plagued wid the quareness o' things ;
For the saisons that come bet the worsest of all the wet summers an' springs
In the lenth o' me life. Och bad cess to the could an' the snow an' the win',
Wid the storms an' the mists an' the polthogues o' rain the week out an' week in,
An' the oats bet to bruss wid the hail, an' the bastes starved or dyin' outright,
Until afther the thundher in June, all the praties were sthruck wid the blight,
As ye couldn't misdoubt if ye wint thro' the fields. But th' ould master, ye see,
Keepin' close in the house all that while, 'cause he said he 'd the gout in his knee—
Tho' 'twas liker the grief at his heart—he 'd no notion what ruin was in 't ;
An' so, liefer than have him annoyed, it 's the greatest ould lies we 'd invint.

For we tould him the harvest and all was as fine
as a farmer could wish ;
An' o' times when the most we could do was to
sort him a sizeable dish
O' sound praties to serve wid his dinner, we 'd
say that but seldom afore
Such a crop had been dug on the Inish ; an',
certin, that lie was no more
Than the truth ; for 'twas worse than the worst.
But one mornin' he tuk to declare
He was sure that the blight was about, for he 'd
noticed the scent on the air ;
An' we thought he 'd find out on us thin ; but we
swore it was merely a heap
Of haulms rottin' ; and afther that day we 'd the
sinse to be careful to keep
A big bonfire o' rubbish alight, if the win' was
that way, close at hand,
So he 'd smell on'y smoke ; an', the praise be to
goodness, we chated him grand.

And ourselves would be boilin' the weed, off the rocks, that 's the quare ugly thrash,
All the boilin' in wather an' fire 'll make no more than a bitter bad brash ;
Just to keep o' the sowl in your body, where every one keeps it that can,
Tho' 't might aisy lodge better outside, if we knew but the lie o' the lan'.
Thin the summer dhreeped off into autumn, the same as a soaked sod o' turf
Smoulders black ere it flickers a flame ; an' the storms came wid say-waves an' surf
Ragin' wild up the beach ; an' the nights long an' dark, an' the days cold and dhrear,
An' we thinkin' besides that th' ould master 'ud scarcely last out the ould year.
Och, I never remimbered whin things on the Inish seemed lookin' so black,
For 'twas ugly the winter 'ud be, wid a cruel hungry spring at its back.

X

But far on in the last of October, the news
that come suddint one morn
Nearly dhruv us deminted wid joy; 'twas too
good to be true we'd ha' sworn,
On'y somehow the Divil himself scarce seemed
divil enough to go plot
Such a thrick on th' ould master as that; if he
would, he deserves all he's got.
'Twas a letter, no less, from young master him-
self, wrote the next day but one
From where else on the earth save ould Dublin, in
reach 'twixt two shines o' the sun;
And ourselves had made sure we might thravel
the world, an' his grave all we'd find
At its farthest—'twas grand. An' the letter
explained how he'd made up his mind

That th' ould master was gone. For some folk
comin' sthraight from this counthry, they said,
Havin' hould of the story's wrong end, that O'Neil
o' the Inish was dead—
Inish Fay—no mistake could be in it at all at all
—every one knew.
An' thin poor Misther Denis got desprit, not
doubtin' the throuble was true ;
For it happint the sweetheart he had wint an'
died on him too, an' he thought
All his life was disthroyed, an' the rest just a
rubbish that mattered for nought.
So he joined wid a party explorin' some big
lonely hills afther gould,
An' they sted there I dunno how long, till the
fortins they made was untould ;
But whin once he got back among people, by
chance the first thing he heard tell
Was how folks home from Connaught were sayin'
his father was livin' an' well.

An' wid that he slipt into a boat that by luck was just puttin' to say,
Never waitin' to write by the wires. An' belike he 'd be here the next day.

XI

Whiles I 've seen a big elm-tree the storm 's afther blowin' clane out o' the ground,
That lay stark where it fell all the long winter thro', till the spring-time came round,
An' the twigs on its boughs in the grass 'ud be greenin' wid leaf-buds an' shoots
Same as if they were wavin' above ; but one knew it was up by the roots,
An' the life dyin' out of it. That 's what I thought on whinever I seen
How th' ould master cheered up wid the news. He that wouldn't ha' cared a thraneen

If they 'd tould him his best cow was dead, or say-
wather had boiled wid his tay,
He was askin' for this an' for that, an' discoorsin'
and orderin' away ;
An' remimb'rin' whate'er Misther Denis was plased
wid in th' ould times long sin' :
'Lest he 'll find things amiss here to-morrow,' sez
he, 'whin we have him agin.'
Yet he scarce could set one fut 'fore t' other, tho'
for pleasure he couldn't keep quite ;
An' we thought, sure, young master 'd find more
gone amiss than he 'd aisy set right.
But the first thing th' ould master 'd go do, was
to send the boys over beyant
Wid a boat-load of orders for aught he could think
Misther Denis might want—
Ale, an' baccy, an' cheese, an' the round little cakes
that he liked wid his wine,
And a rug for his room that the rats had ate up
into ravels o' twine ;

And a couple o' chairs, 'cause the rest had got
burnt by some manner o' manes
When the girls would be short o' dhry sticks for
the fires; an' some glass for the panes
That was out of his windy since ever the cord had
gev way wid a smash;
And his tongs had been broke in two halves, so
they used it for proppin' the sash—
And I dunno what else all besides. But before
we expected thim home,
They were roarin' like bulls up the beach wid the
news Misther Denis was come.
For who else but himself had they met on the
quays, safe an' sound, on'y grown
Somethin' oulder; white sthrakes in his hair—
'Och,' we sez, 'let that story alone:
Where'd the lad get white hairs on his head?'—
And he'd bid thim be rowin' back sthraight,
And himself 'ud be over and afther thim soon, for
he had but to wait

Till his thraps were on board. There was news!
Howsome'er we agreed 'twould be best
To tell nought for a while to th' ould master, who 'd
gone to his room for a rest,
Or he 'd likely enough get his death standin' round
in the could out o' doors;
So we settled to call him whenever we heard the
first crake o' the oars.

XII

Just a still misty day wid no shadow or shine
was that same Holy Eve;
Not a breath on the smooth o' the say, on'y now
an' agin a soft heave
Swellin' up here an' there, as ye 'll see in a sheet
spread to blaich by the hedge,
That keeps risin' an' fallin' as oft as a breeze creeps
in under the edge.

Yet, as still as it was, we well knew that thim heaves was a sure sign o' win'

On its way ; an' we all were a-wishin' the boat 'ud make haste an' come in ;

But we watched an' we wished till nigh sunset, an' never the sound of a pull,

Till at last, dhrifted in from the west, came the fog like a fleece o' sheep's wool

Sthreeled down low on the wather, an' hidin' away whatsoever it passed

In its sthreelin' ; and all of a minute, out somewhere behind it, a blast

Lep' up howlin' an' rushin' an' flustherin' thro' it, an' dhrivin' it on,

Till afore we knew rightly 'twas comin', it 's everythin' else seemed clane gone.

For your eyes was 'most blinded wid spray, an' the win' deaved your ears wid its roar,

Not a step could ye look past the foam that seethed white to your fut on the shore ;

Sure ye couldn't ha' tould but the Inish was left
in the wide world alone,
Just set down be itself in the midst of a mist and
a great dhreary moan.

XIII

An' the thought of us each was the boat; och,
however 'd she stand it at all,
If she 'd started an hour or two back, an' been
caught in the thick o' that squall?
Sure it 's lost she was, barrin' by luck it so chanced
she 'd run under the lee
O' Point Bertragh or Inish Lonane; an' 'twas liker
the crathurs 'ud be
Crossin' yonder the open, wid never a shelter, but
waves far an' wide
Rowlin' one on the other till ye 'd seem at the fut
of a mad mountain-side.

An' the best we could hope was they'd seen that
the weather'd be turnin' out quare,
An' might, happen, ha' settled they wouldn't come
over, but bide where they were.
Yet, begorrah! 'twould be the quare weather en-
tirely, as some of us said,
That 'ud put Misther Denis off aught that he'd
fairly tuk into his head.
Thin Tim Duigan sez: 'Arrah, lads, whisht! afther
sailin' thro' oceans o' say,
Don't tell *me* he's naught better to do than get
dhrowned in our dhrop of a bay.'
An' the words were scarce out of his mouth, whin
hard by, thro' a dhrift o' the haze,
The ould boat we beheld sthrivin' on in the storm
—och the yell we did raise!
An' it's little we yelled for, bedad! for, next
instant, there under our eyes,
Not a couple o' perch from the pier-end, th' ould
baste she must take an' capsize.

XIV

Och ! small blame to thim all if we 'd never seen
sight of a one o' thim more,
Wid the waves thumpin' thuds where they fell,
like the butt-ends o' beams on a door ;
An' the black hollows whirlin' between, an' the
dhrift flyin' over thim thick,
'S if the Divil had melted down Hell, an' was
stirrin' it up wid a stick.
But it happint the wave that they met wid was
flounderin' sthraight to the strand,
An' just swep' thim up nate on its way, till it set
thim down safe where the sand
Isn't wet twice a twelvemonth, no hurt on thim
all, on'y dhrippin' an' dazed.
And one come to his feet nigh me door, where
that mornin' me heifer had grazed.

An', bedad! 'twas himself, Misther Denis, stood
blinkin' an' shakin' the wet
From his hair: 'Hullo, Connor!' sez he, 'is it you,
man?' He'd never forget
One he'd known. But I'd hardly got hould of
his hand, an' was wishin' him joy,
Whin, worse luck, he looked round an' he spied
Widdy Sullivan's imp of a boy,
That a wave had tuk off of his feet, an' was floatin'
away from the beach,
And he screechin' an' sthretchin' his arms to be
saved, but no help was in reach.
An' as soon as the young master he seen it, he
caught his hand out o' me own:
'Now, stand clear, man,' sez he, 'would ye have
me be lavin' the lad there to dhrown?'
An' wid that he throd knee-deep in foam-swirls.
Ochone! but he gev us the slip,
Runnin' sheer down the black throat o' Death, an'
he just afther 'scapin' its grip.

For the wild says come flappin' an' boomin' an' smotherin' o'er him, an' back
In the lap o' their ragin' they swep' him as light as a wisp o' brown wrack.
An' they poundin' the rocks like sledge-hammers, an' clatterin' the shingle like chains;
Ne'er the live sowl they'd let from their hould till they'd choked him or bet out his brains,
Sure an' certin. And in swung a wave wid its welthers o' wather that lept
Wid the roar of a lion as it come, an' hissed low like a snake as it crept
To its edge, where it tossed thim, the both o' thim. Och! an' the little spalpeen
Misther Denis had gript be the collar, he jumped up the first thing we seen,
While young master lay still—not a stir—he was stunned wid a crack on the head—
Just a flutter o' life at his heart—but it's kilt he was, kilt on us dead.

XV

An' so that was the end of it all. An' the sorrowful end tubbe sure,
Whin our luck was turned back into throuble no power in creation could cure.
There he lay, 'twixt the sod an' the foam, wid the spray flingin' sparkles in the sun,
For the storm had throoped off in a hurry, contint wid what mischief was done,
An' the last o' the day in the west from a chink o' clear gold on the rim
Sent low rays slantin' red o'er the fall o' the say to the white face of him
That was still as the image asleep o' the lad we'd remimbered so long;
Never oulder a day in those years. An' ourselves standin' round in a throng

Kep' a clack like the gulls overhead that were
flickerin' the light wid their wings,
And as much wit in one as the other. Och! sure
there's no grief but it brings
Friends to thravel its road. For while yet we
were feelin' his hands stiff'nin' could,
An' were sayin' the fine winsome lad, an' the heart-
break it was to behould,
Comes ould Peggy, the housekeeper, throttin' to
say that th' ould master had woke,
And had sent her to thry was there news. News?
It seemed like the Divil's own joke.
An' what ailed him to wake? He'd a right to
ha' slep', wid that news at his door,
Till the world's end. 'Is't news ye'd be afther?'
sez Mick. 'Ay, there's news here galore;
But it's news that I wouldn't be tellin' while e'er
I've a tongue in me head;
I'd as lief stick a knife in his heart, an' he lyin'
asleep on his bed.'

An' sez Gallaher: 'Musha, what need to be tellin' him yet? Better send

For his Riverence beyant that consoles ye whin trouble's past hopin' to mend.

An' till thin there might some one step up an' let on nothing'd happint below,

To contint him.' An' we all thought the same, an' yet no one was wishful to go;

For we feared he might somehow get hould o' the truth. Then me brother, sez he:

'Sure here's Pat, it's colloguin' a dale wid th' ould master he is'—manin' me—

'He's the man to be sendin'; forby he'll tell lies be the dozen as fast

As a dog throts, will Pat.' So they talked till they had me persuaded at last;

And I thrapesed off up to the House. God forgive me, each step that I wint,

I was schemin' the quarest onthruths I could throuble me mind to invint.

XVI

But I tould him the sorra a one, as ye'll see;
'twas no doin' o' mine.
For whin into his room I was come, that seemed
dark, passin' out o' the shine
O' the sunset just glimmerin' around yet, th' ould
master laned up where he lay
Afther takin' a bit of a rest on the bed, for the
most o' that day
He 'd been creepin' about to get everythin' readied
up dacint 'gin e'er
The young master was home. Goodness help
him, it 's time he 'd enough an' to spare;
No more need to be hurryin' for that than for
Doomsday, if on'y he 'd guessed—
I was sayin', whin I 'd knocked at his door, an'
slipped in to decaive him me best,

It 's beyant an' forby me his eyes kep' on gazin' an' shinin' ; I thought

Mayhap some one was follyin' behind me, but whin I looked round I seen nought,

Ne'er a sowl save meself, that I dunna believe he tuk heed on at all.

An' sez he : 'Och, thin, Denis, me lad, so ye 're here? Why, the step in the hall

Sounded strange-like ; and I to be listenin', an' never to think it was you.

But, in troth, till ye stood in me sight, I 'd no aisier believe me luck true

Than if sthraight ye were come from the Dead. For the time, lad, wint wonderful slow,

An' it seems like the lenth o' me life since ye left us this great while ago ;

An' sure only to look down a long lenth o' time sthrikes the could to your heart,

Let alone whin the days sthretch away, each like each, an' nought keeps thim apart

Save the nights, when ye sleep scarce enough for
a dhrame that as soon as ye wake
Sets ye grievin'. Thim whiles there 's no end to
the notions an ould body'll take—
And I larned, livin' lonesome, 'twas ould I had
grown. If I tould ye the half
O' what all I was vexed wid supposin' an' dhreadin',
ye couldn't but laugh.
On'y one thing I 've settled, no laughin' about it,
but certin an' sure :
I 'll not lose ye that long, lad, agin, for it 's more
than me mind can endure.
True enough, ye 're but young in your life, and it 's
best maybe 's waitin' unknown
Worlds away from our bit of an Inish ; all 's one,
ye 'll ne'er quit it alone,
For there 's plenty no younger than me must be
rovin' as ould as they are—
It 's together we 'll go, you and I, lad, next time
that ye 're thravellin' so far.

Ay, together,' sez he. An' wid that come two wails
o' the wind, an' between
Sthruck a cry that was wailed by no win'; 'twas
the girls below raisin' a keen;
But he laned his head back lookin' plased an' con-
tint; an' they kep' keenin' on.
They were keenin' for more than they meant all
the while, for th' ould master was gone.

XVII

So I 'd sorra a hand in the matter meself, I may
truly declare.
'Twas th' Almighty's own notion that night to
decaive him, if decaivin' it were.
So whatever misfortins th' ould master experienced,
I hould in a way
He 'd the bettermost sort o' bad luck—an' that 's
somethin'—because ye may say

His worst throuble as good as ne'er chanced him ;
ne'er come to his hearin' or sight,
And a hurt that ye feel unbeknownst, as the sayin'
is, is apt to be light.
An' bedad he's well out of it all ; it's ourselves
have the raison to grieve
While the say meets the shore for what happint
this Inish that black Holy Eve.
But I 'll whisht ; for I 'm thinkin' when things have
determined to run to the bad,
There's no use in discoorsin' an' frettin' save on'y
to dhrive yourself mad ;
Since the storms, or the blight, or the rint comes
agin one wherever one goes,
Till one takes the last turnin'. An' thin if it 's true,
as some people suppose,
Better luck follows thim that are lavin' than thim
that are bidin' behind—
Sure it 's off ye 'll slip one o' these days, an' what
need to be throublin' your mind ?

WALLED OUT

OR, ESCHATOLOGY IN A BOG

Οὐκ ὄναρ, ἀλλ' ὕπαρ ἐσθλὸν ὅ τοι τετελεσμένον ἔσται ;

WALLED OUT

OR, ESCHATOLOGY IN A BOG

I

In last September it was, whin the weather 'll
be mostly grand,
Wid the sunshine turnin' the colour o' corn all over
the land,
An' the two young gintlemen came to shoot wid
their guns an' their dogs,
A-thrampin' just for divarsion about the hills an'
the bogs.
And I thramped afther thim, tho' it 's little divarsion
I had,
Carryin' the baskits an' all; but sure it 's meself
was glad

To earn the shillin's at sunset, an' iligant loonch
be the way ;
Mate, an' bread, an' a dhrop to dhrink—ye needed
no more that day.
For, tho' 'twas thick o' the harvest, down here the
bogs an' the hills
Lave on'y narrow slips o' fields for the furrows an'
pratie dhrills ;
Terrible quick they 're raped an' dug ; but what
should the farmer do?
If there 's on'y work for wan, he can't find wages
for two.

II

An' wanst we were restin' a bit in the sun on the
smooth hillside,
Where the grass felt warm to your hand as the
fleece of a sheep, for wide

As ye 'd look overhead an' around, 'twas all a-blaze
and a-glow,
An' the blue was blinkin' up from the blackest
bog-holes below;
An' the scent o' the bogmint was sthrong on the
air, an' never a sound
But the plover's pipe that ye 'll seldom miss by a
lone bit o' ground.
An' he laned—Misther Pierce—on his elbow, an'
stared at the sky as he smoked,
Till just in an idle way he sthretched out his hand
an' sthroked
The feathers o' wan of the snipe that was kilt an'
lay close by on the grass;
An' there was the death in the crathur's eyes like
a breath upon glass.
An' sez he: 'It 's quare to think that a hole ye
might bore wid a pin
'Ill be wide enough to let such a power o' dark-
ness in

On such a power o' light ; an' it 's quarer to think,'
sez he,
'That wan o' these days the like is bound to
happen to you an' me.'
Thin Misther Barry, he sez : 'Musha, how 's wan
to know but there 's light
On t' other side o' the dark, as the day comes
afther the night ?'
An' 'Och,' sez Misther Pierce, 'what more 's our
knowin'—save the mark—
Than guessin' which way the chances run, an' thinks
I they run to the dark ;
Or else agin now some glint of a bame 'd ha' come
slithered an' slid ;
Sure light 's not aisy to hide, an' what for should
it be hid ? '
Up he stood wid a sort o' laugh ; 'If on light,' sez
he, 'ye 're set,
Let 's make the most o' this same, as it 's all that
we 're like to get.'

III

Thim were his words, as I minded well, for often afore an' sin'
The 'dintical thought 'ud bother me head that seemed to bother him thin ;
An' many 's the time I 'd be wond'rin' whatever it all might mane,
The sky, an' the lan', an' the bastes, an' the rest o' thim plain as plain,
And all behind an' beyant thim a big black shadow let fall ;
Ye 'll sthrain the sight out of your eyes, but there it stands like a wall.
'An' there,' sez I to meself, 'we 're goin' wherever we go,
But where we 'll be whin we git there it 's never a know I know.'

Thin whiles I thought I was maybe a sthookawn
to throuble me mind
Wid sthrivin' to comprehind onnathural things o'
the kind;
An' Quality, now, that have larnin', might know
the rights o' the case,
But ignorant wans like me had betther lave it in
pace.

IV

Priest, tubbe sure, an' Parson, accordin' to what
they say,
The whole matther's plain as a pikestaff an' clear
as the day,
An' to hear thim talk of a world beyant ye'd
think at the laste
They'd been dead an' buried half their lives, an'
had thramped it from west to aist;

An' who 's for above, an' who 's for below they 've as pat as if they could tell
The name of every saint in Heaven an' every divil in Hell.
But cock up the likes of thimselves to be settlin' it all to their taste—
I sez, and the wife she sez I 'm no more nor a haythin baste—
For mighty few o' thim 's rael Quality, musha, they 're mostly a pack
O' playbians, each wid a tag to his name an' a long black coat to his back ;
An' it 's on'y romancin' they are belike ; a man must stick be his trade,
An' *they* git their livin' by lettin' on they know how wan's sowl is made.
And in chapel or church they 're bound to know somethin' for sure, good or bad,
Or where 'd be the sinse o' their preachin' an' prayers an' hymns an' howlin' like mad ?

So who 'd go mindin' o' thim? barrin' women, in coorse, an' wanes,

That believe 'most aught ye tell thim, if they don't understand what it manes—

Bedad, if it worn't the nathur o' women to want the wit,

Parson an' Priest I 'm a-thinkin' might shut up their shop an' quit.

But, och, it 's lost an' disthracted the crathurs 'ud be widout

Their bit o' divarsion on Sundays whin all o' thim gits about,

Cluth'rin' an' plutth'rin' together like hins, an' a-roostin' in rows,

An' meetin' their frins an' their neighbours, an' wearin' their dacint clothes.

An' sure it 's quare that the clergy can't ever agree to keep

Be tellin' the same thrue story, sin' they know such a won'erful heap;

For many a thing Priest tells ye that Parson sez
is a lie,
An' which has a right to be wrong, the divil a
much know I,
For all the differ I see 'twixt the pair o' thim 'd
fit in a nut:
Wan for the Union, an' wan for the League, an'
both o' thim bitther as sut.
But Misther Pierce, that 's a gintleman born, an'
has college larnin' and all,
There he was starin' no wiser than me where the
shadow stands like a wall.

V

An' soon afther thin, it so happint, things grew
so conthráry an' bad,
I fell to wond'rin' a dale if beyant there 's aught
betther at all to be had;

For the blacker this ould world looks, an' the more ye're bothered an' vexed,
The more ye'll be cravin' an' longin' for somethin' else in the next;
While whinever there's little that ails ye, an' all goes slither as grase,
Ye don't so much as considher, bedad, if there's e'er such a place.
The same as a man comin' home from his work of a winther's night,
Whin the wind's like ice, an' the snow an' the rain have him perished outright,
His heart'll be set on a good turf blaze up the chimney roarin' an' red,
That'll put the life in him agin afore he goes to his bed;
Tho' on summer evenin's, whin soft as silk was every breath that wint,
He'd never have axed for a fire, but turned to his sleep contint.

VI

The first thing that wint agin us, an' sure we were rale annoyed,
Was when Smithson, he that 's steward at the Big House, he tuk an' desthroyed
Rexy, our little white dog, that we 'd rared from no more than a pup,
For a matther o' four or five year, an' had kep' him an' petted him up.
Huntin' the sheep? If ye 'd seen him ye 'd know they were tellin' a lie,
Him that wasn't the size of a rabbit, an' wouldn't ha' hurted a fly.
And the frinliest baste, morebetoken, ye 'd find in a long day's walk,
An' knowin' an' sinsible, too, as many a wan that can talk.

I might come home early or late, yet afore I was heard or seen,

He 'd be off like a shot an' meet me a dozen perch down the boreen ;[1]

An' whiles ye 'd be kilt wid laughin', that quare wor his ways an' his thricks—

But there he lay stone dead be the gate at the back o' Hourigan's ricks ;

For it 's creepin' home the crathur was in hopes to die near his frins,

On'y he couldn't creep no furdher wid the leg of him smashed into splins.

An' och, but the house was lonesome whin we 'd buried him down be the dyke,

An' the childer bawled thimselves sick, for they thought that there wasn't his like ;

An' just this night, comin' up to the door, I was thinkin' I 'd give a dale

For the sound of his bark, an' the pat of his paws, an' the wag of his tail.

[1] A narrow lane with high banks.

VII

An' thin the winther began, on a suddint it seemed, for the trees
Were flamin' like fire in the wood whin it tuk to perish an' freeze;
An' thro' your bones like a knife wint the win' that come keenin' around,
An' afther that wid the pours o' rain we were fairly dhrowned.
For the wather'd be runnin' in sthrames beneath the step at the door,
An' t'ould thatch that's thick wid holes let it dhrip in pools on the floor,
Till sorra the fire 'ud burn, wid the peat-sods no betther than mud,
Since the stacks thimselves outside seemed meltin' away in the flood.

But the worst of it was those times, that, what wid the wet an' the frost,
Ne'er a hand's turn could be done in the fields, so wan's wages were lost.
Many's the week I could scarce git a job from wan end to the other,
An' many's the night they wint hungry to bed, both childher an' mother—
An', begorra, the hardest day's work a man ever did is to sit
Wid his hands before him at home, whin the childher haven't a bit.
Thin the wife tuk sick, an' was mortial bad, an' cravin' a dhrink as she lay,
An' I couldn't so much as git her, the crathur, a sup o' tay ;
An' the floor was says o' mud, an' the house a smother o' smoke,
Till between thim all, begorra, me heart it was fairly broke.

VIII

But I mind wan Sathurday's night, whin we just were starved wid the could,
Me mother, she that we keep, an' that 's growin' terrible ould,
All of a heap she was crouched be the hearth that was black as your grave,
For clane gone out was the fire; and her ould head never 'ud lave
Thrimblin' on like a dhrop o' rain that 's ready to fall from the row,
The faster it thrimbles an' thrimbles the sooner it is to go.
And her poor ould hands were thrimblin' as she sthretched thim out for the haté,
For she 'd gone too blind to see that there wasn't a spark in the grate;

Nor bit nor sup she'd had but a crust o' dhry
bread that day,
'Cause our praties had rotted on us, an' we'd had
to throw thim away;
An' I knowed she was vexed, for, sure, it's but
doatin' she is afther all,
And 'ill fret like a child whin she feels that her
slice is cut skimpy an' small;
But other whiles she'd be grievin that we'd not
got quit of her yet,
An' misdoubtin' we grudged away from the
childher each morsel she'd get.
An' watchin' her sittin' there, an' rememb'rin'
the life she'd led,
For me father dhrank, an' she'd throuble enough
to keep the pack of us fed,
An' never the comfort she'd now, an' she grown
feeble an' blind—
I couldn't but think 'twas a cruel bad job for such
as she if behind

The blackness over beyant there was nought but could for the could,
An' dark for the dark—no new world at all to make amends for the ould.
Tho' in troth it 'ud have to be the quarest world ye could name
That 'ud make it worth wan's while to ha' lived in the likes o' this same.

IX

But the dhrame I dhreamt that night was as sthrange as sthrange, for thin
I thought I had come to a place whose aquil I never was in,
An' nobody 'd tould me 'twas out o' this world, yet as soon as I came
Just o' meself I knew it, as people will in a dhrame.

An' it looked an iligant counthry, an' all in a glimmerin' green,
The colour o' leaves in the spring, wid a thrimble o' mist between;
An' the smell o' the spring was in it, but the light that sthramed over all
Was liker the shine of a sunset whin leaves are beginnin' to fall.

X

An' two were talkin' together, that must ha' been standin' near,
Tho' out o' me sight they kep'; an' their voices were pleasant to hear.
An' wan o' them sez to the other: 'It's this I don't undherstand,
The sinse o' this wall built yonder around an' about the land'—

An', sure, as he spoke I saw where it glimpsed
thro' the boughs close by—
'For,' sez he, 'it hides our world, as the thruth is
hid be a lie,
From every sowl that 's alive on the weary earth
below,
Till ne'er such a place there might be at all, for
aught they can know.
But grand it 'ud be some mornin' to make it melt
off like the haze,
An' lave thim a sight o' this land that they 're
comin' to wan o' these days.
For look ye at Ireland, now, where they 're just in
a desperit state,
Wid the people sleepin' on mud, an' wantin' the
morsel to ait;
If they knew there was betther in store, I dunno
what harm could be in 't,
Or what it 'ud do but hearten thim up, an' keep
thim a bit contint.'

XI

Thin t' other: 'Mind you, there's many that's new to this place,' sez he,
'Comes axin' the same as yourself. But considher the way it 'ud be.
For whin wanst we downed wid the wall, an' nothin' was left to pervint
The poor folks yonder beholdin' the grandeur we've here fornint,
An' nearer a dale, belike, than they'd ever ha' thought or believed,
Who are the fools that 'ud stay any more where they're throubled an' grieved,
An' wouldn't be off wid thim here? Why, now, whin there's nought but a vast
O' shadow an' blackness afore him who looks to his death an' past

Why, even so, there's a few comes in that life wid
its weary work
Has dhruv intirely mad, till they lept to their ends
in the dark.
'An' in Ireland, sure, this instant, there's crowds
o' thim sailin' bound
Off to the States an' 'Sthralia, that's half o' the
whole world round,
Miles an' miles thro' the waves an' storms, an' whin
they 've got there, bedad,
No such won'erful lands, but just where their livin's
aisier had.
An' it's mostly the young folks go, so the ould do
be frettin' sore,
For thim that are gone they doubt 'ill come home
in their time no more;
An' dhreary as e'er the long winther's night is the
lonesome summer's day,
Whin there's never a stir in the house, an' the
childher are over the say.

'And, arrah now, wouldn't it be the worst day
that ould Ireland has known,
Whin she 'd waken an' find all the people had
quitted an' left her alone?
Never a voice to be heard, or a hover o' smoke to
be spied,
An' sorra a sowl to set fut on the green o' the grass
far an' wide,
Till the roads ran lone thro' the lan' as the sthrame
that most desolit flows,
An' the bastes, sthrayed away in the fields, grew
as wild as the kites an' the crows,
An' no wan to care what became o' the counthry
left starin' an' stark—
But that 's how 'twould happen if ever we let thim
look clear thro' the dark.'

XII

An' the other, sez he: 'Thrue for ye; but what seems sthrange to me yet
Is the notions they 've learned down yonder in spite o' this screen ye 've set;
For there 's many hears tell of a pleasant place where a man 'ill go whin he dies,
An' some be that certin sure, ye 'd think they 'd seen it all wid their eyes.'

XIII

'The raison o' that,' sez he, 'is, we wouldn't let thim despair,
Cliver an' clane, any more than we 'd show thim the whole of it clear;

So wanst in a while we 've given to some poor crathur o' thim

A glimpse at this place, but on'y lapt up in a mist like an' dim.

An' as soon as it slips from their sight 'tis dhrowned in the darkness deep,

Till sometimes they doubt afther all if 'twas aught but a dhrame in their sleep.

An' the rest spy nothin' at all, but they hear from the folks that do,

An' they wish it so bad that often they believe they believe it 's thrue.

'But suppose, now, wan that was hungry could watch unbeknownst thro' a chink

Where some had a faste preparin', the finest ye ever could think,

If he thought he 'd a chance o' the thrate, sure it 's quiet an' still he 'd wait,

For fear if he came ere they called they 'd be puttin' him out of it sthraight.'

XIV

That 's all their discoorse I remember, for thin, as sure as I 'm born,
It was Rexy's bark that I heard—no other baste's, I 'll be sworn:
And I couldn't tell ye the pleasure I tuk in 't, for somehow the sound
Seemed givin' a nathural feel to whatever I seen around.
And I just was thinkin': 'It 's mad wid joy, poor Rexy, he 'd be if he knew
There was wan of us come from th' ould place at home'—whin, och wirrasthrew,
All in a minute I opened me eyes where I lay on the floor,
An' the child was keenin' away, an' the wind moanin' under the door,

An' the puddle was freezed by the hearth, that hadn't a spark to show,
An' outside in the could daylight the air was a-flutther wid snow,
An' the black bank sthraked wid white like the bars on a magpie's wing—
For sorra a word o' thruth was in't, an' I 'd nought but dhramed the thing.

XV

Sorra a word o' thruth—yet some sez that they 've never a doubt
But there 's plenty o' thruth in a dhrame, if ye turn it the right side out:
An' I mind me mother, wan night she dhreamt of a ship on the say,
An' next mornin' her Micky, the souldier, came home that was years away.

Thin a notion I have, as I woke, I 'd heard wan o' thim two inside
Sayin' : ' Sleep, that 's the chink for a glimpse, but death, that 's the door set wide ' ;
An' whin things do be cruel conthráry, wid could an' the hunger an' all,
Some whiles I fall thinkin' : ' Sure, maybe, it 's on'y a bit o' their wall.'
So p'rhaps it 's a fool that I am, but many 's the time, all the same,
I sez to meself I 'd be wishful for just a dhrame o' that dhrame.

LAST TIME AT M'GURK'S

OR, MICK FLYNN *DE SENECTUTE*

. . . Πολλὰ μὲν αἱ μακραὶ ἀμέραι κατέθεντο δὴ
λύπας ἐγγυτέρω, τὰ τέρποντα δ'οὐκ ἂν ἴδοις ὅπου

LAST TIME AT M'GURK'S

OR, MICK FLYNN *DE SENECTUTE*

I

BETTHER nor thirty year sin' Barney M'Gurk set up
Here by the ould cross-roads, and, begorra, there 's many a sup
I 've tuk sittin' snug be the hearth in the corner he calls me own,
For all it 's a quare bad custhomer Barney 'll ha' found me, ochone,
This long while back, bringin' seldom or never the pinny to spind ;
But Barney M'Gurk isn't wan that 'ud disremember a frind.

So many 's the warm I 've had in the could o' the winther's night,

For he keeps up the grandest o' fires; ye 'll see the glim of it bright

Away down the bog; it 's the divil to pass be the door in the dark,

Whin ye doubt if at home on the bit o' wet floor ye 'll find ever a spark.

And oft o' these summer evenin's I 've watched how the moon 'ill stale

O'er yonder black ridge o' Knockreagh like the ghost of a little white sail,

Wid never a beam to her more than a ball o' the thistle-down,

Till she 'd drink every dhrop o' the light from the breadths o' the air aroun',

An' shine like a bubble o' silver that swells an' swells, an' thin

Float off thro' the thick o' the stars. But I 'll never watch her agin.

II

Barney, he 'd always the luck from the time we were on'y gossoons.
Look at our Band now: I always was terrible fond o' the tunes,
Yet if ever I thried at a note, it 's each finger I had seemed a thumb,
While Barney, just git me the lad that 'ud bate him at batin' the dhrum,
Th' ould sargint, who 'd soldiered in Agypt an' Injy, he swore be his sowl
There wasn't the rigimint marchin' but he 'd aquil it rowlin' the rowl.
Och! it 's thim was the great times entirely for Barney, an' me, an' the boys,
An' we kep' the neighbours alive wid the capers we had an' the noise,

For there'd scarce be a moonshiny night but we'd thramp as far afther our Band
As afther the plough in the field whin ye're trenchin' an acre o' land.
Bangin' away, wid the bits o' spalpeens all throt-throttin' beside,
An' wishin' their legs were the lenth to keep step, an' the doors flyin' wide
Wid the girls lookin' out; an' the moonbeams so still on the fields till we come,
Ye might think all the sounds in the earth had run into each boom of our dhrum.

III

But, throth, I remember the mornin' we started for Ballynagraile
To fetch home ould Andy O'Rourke, who'd a twelvemonth in Limerick jail

For fright'nin' the bailiffs—divil mend thim—that
dhruv off his mare for the tithe,
And Andy he bid thim begone, or he 'd shorten
their legs wid his scythe.
So we all were assembled to meet him; ye never
beheld such a throng,
Down the lenth o' the sthreet, wid folk standin'
to see us come marchin' along;
'Twas as pleasant a mornin' in April as ever shone
out o' the sky,
An' the brass of our insthruments gleamin' was fit
to ha' dazzled your eye;
But the pólis looked cross as the dogs, 'cause they
couldn't be rights interfere
To hinder our lads o' their playin'; bedad! an' ye
felt, whin ye 'd hear
How they wint like the thundher an' lightnin',
that afther the dhrum an' the fife
Ye could step to the end o' the world, wid all the
pleasure in life.

An' close where I waited, I mind, there came hobblin' outside of his door
An ould ancient man, I can't tell ye his name—
I 'd ne'er seen him before—
All doubled in two, wid a beard like a fleece, an' scarce able to stand,
For he shook like a bough in the win', tho' he laned on a stick in each hand.
But to notice the glint of his eye, whin they sthruck up *Saint Pathrick*; bedad,
If he 'd had thim same eyes in his feet, it 's a jig he 'd ha' danced there like mad;
On'y just the wan minute; for thin he stared round, seemin' sthrange to the place,
Till he turned away back to his door wid a quare sort o' look on his face,
As if he was layin' his hand off o' somethin' he liefer 'ud hould,
An' soft to himself I heard him: 'Sure I 'm ould,' sez he, 'sure I 'm ould.'

IV

There's some things that run on in your mind
like a thread that's onevenly spun
Down your coat-sleeve; for, afther these years, I
'most see him stand clear in the sun;
But now, be worse luck, I can tell what I couldn't
ha' tould that day—
The notion he had in his head, whin he said it
an' turned away.
To be ould—sure, considh'rin' the time ye'll
be growin' so before your own eyes,
It's quare how whinever ye think o't it seems like
a sort o' surprise;
My belief's that if people were sevinty the very
first day they were born,
They'd never git used to it rightly, and if, be odd
chance, some fine morn

The ouldest ould man in the counthry would find
whin he wakened that he
Was a slip of a lad, he'd just feel it the nathur'lest
thing that could be.
So it's noways too sthrange if wan's sometimes
forgittin' awhile how things stand,
Like the ould chap at Ballynagraile, whin his
mind was tuk up wid our Band.

V

But the marchin' around, an' the tunes, an' the
thricks that the young fellows play,
'Tisn't thim ye think badly o' missin', at laste on'y
wanst in a way;
For, as far as I know be experience, ye 'll mostly
be plased nigh as well
If the childher 've their bit o' divarsion the same
as ye had yoursel';

An' your legs get so stiff of an evenin', that afther
your day's work is done
Ye're contint wid the full o' your pipe at the door,
and a sight o' the fun.
It's your work, your day's work; that's the
mischief. It's little enough I knew,
Whin the sun had me scorched to the bone, or the
win' maybe perished right thro',
In the field or the bog, as might chance, an' I'd
think to meself I could wish
Nought betther than never agin to be loadin' a
cart or a kish—
It's little I knew; for, sure, now, whin I couldn't
to save o' me soul
So much just as carry a creel to our heap from
the next bog-hole,
The two eyes I'd give out o' me head to be peltin'
away at it still,
Mowin' a meadow, or cuttin' the turf, ay, or
ploughin' up hill.

For I hate to be hearin' the lads turnin' out whin
the dawn blinks in,
And I lyin' there like a log wid the sorra a job
to begin,
Barrin' helpin' to ait up the praties, an' they none
too plenty perhaps;
Sure, the pig 's worther keepin', poor baste, for it 's
fatter he gits on his scraps.
So at home be the hearth-stone I stick, or I creep
up an' down be the wall,
An' the day feels as long as a week, an' there
seems no sinse in it all.

VI

And in throth I 've no call to be laid on the shelf
yet, as ould as I be:
There 's Thady O'Neill up above, that 's a year or
so senior to me,

An' passin' his meadow just now, I seen it was mowin', and bedad,
There 's himself in it stoopin' away as limber an' soople as a lad.
An' the Widdy Maclean, that was married afore I was three fut high,
She 'll thramp her three mile to the town every market day that comes by.
'Twas the fever, last Lent was a twelvemonth, disthroyed me ; I 'm fit for nought since.
The way of it was : Our ould cow had sthrayed off thro' the gap in the fence,
An' Long Daly he met me an' tould me. Sez he : ' An' ye 'll need to make haste,
If it 's dhry-fut ye 'd find her this night.' For away o'er the hills to the aist
The hail-showers were slantin' in sthrakes ; an' thin wanst clane across wid a swipe
Wint the lightnin'. An' : ' Look-a,' sez he, ' there 's Saint Pether a-kindlin' his pipe ;

That 'ill take a good sup to put out.' An', thrue
for him, he 'd scarce turned his back,
Whin it settled to polther an' pour, an' the sky
overhead grew as black
As the botthomless pit; not a stim could I see,
nor a sight o' the baste,
But, sthravadin' about in the bog, I slipped into a
hole to me waist,
An' was never so nigh dhrownin' dead, forby bein'
dhrenched to the skin;
So I groped me way home thro' the dark in the
teeth of a freezin' win'.
An' next mornin' I couldn't move finger nor fut,
all me limbs were that sore,
And I lay there a-ravin' like wild in me bed for a
month an' more;
For me head was on fire, an' the pains was like
gimlits an' knives in me bones,
Till the neighbours a-goin' the road 'ud be hearin'
me groans an' me moans.

An' thin, whin I 'd over'd the worst, as the Docther 'd not looked for at all,
Sure, the strenth was gone out o' me clane, an' I scarcely was able to crawl,
An' that stooped, any rapin'-hook 's sthraighter than me, an' the jints o' me stift,
An' me fingers as crookt as the claws of a kite, wid no use in thim lift;
An' whin first I got on me ould brogues, I stuck fast like a wheel in a rut,
I seemed raisin' the weight o' the world every time that I lifted me fut.

VII

So I sat in the door not long afther, whin Judy O'Neill comes by,
An': 'Bedad, Mick Flynn, ye 're an ould man grown,' sez she; an': 'Git out!' sez I.

But as soon as she'd passed I stepped round to
the field that the lads were in,
For I thought I 'd been idlin' enough, an' 'twas time
I set to it agin.
They were diggin' the first of the praties ; I smelt
thim 'fore ever I came,
An' I dunno a pleasanter scent in the world than
the smell o' thim same,
Whin ye thrust down your spade or your fork, an'
ye turn thim up hangin' in clumps,
Wid the skins o' thim yeller an' smooth, an' the
clay shakin' off thim in lumps.
They 'd a creel on the bank be the gate, an' Pat
called from his end o' the dhrill
To be bringin' it up where he was, for he wanted
another to fill ;
And I thought to ha' lifted it light, but I 'd betther
ha' let it alone,
Tho' 'twas hardly three-parts full, an' 'ud hould
but a couple o' stone ;

For I hadn't the strenth to hoist it, and over it
wint wid a pitch,
An' there like a sthookaun I stood, an' the praties
rowled in the ditch.
But Pat, whin he seen I was vexed, up he come
an' laid hould o' me arm,
An' he bid me never to mind, for there wasn't a
ha'porth o' harm.
An' sez I: 'I 'm not able for aught.' An' sez he:
'Dad, ye 've worked in your day
Like a Trojin, an' now ye 've a right to your rest,
while we 'll wrastle away.
Sure it 's many a creel ye 've loaded afore I 'd the
strenth or the wit;
And ye needn't be throublin' your head, for there 's
plinty of help I 'll git;
Here 's Larry an' Tim grown sizeable lads, an'
Joe 'll soon be lendin' a hand—
So ye 'll just sit quite in your corner, an' see that
we 'll git on grand.'

And he said it as kind as could be, yet me heart
felt as heavy as lead,
And I wint to the door, and I sat in the sun, but I
wished I was dead.

VIII

He 's been always a good son, Pat, an' the wife,
there 's no fau't in his wife,
Sure she 's doin' her best to keep house sin' me
ould woman lost her life;
But the throuble she 's had—och! the crathur,
small blame to her now if she 'd think
It was time they were quit of a wan fit for nought
save to ait an' to dhrink.
For whiles, whin she 's washin' the praties, or
cuttin' the childher's bread,
I know be the look of her face she 's rememb'rin'
the child that 's dead;

The littlest, that died in last winther, and often afore it died
Did be askin' its mammy for bread, an' thin, 'cause she'd none, it cried;
An' the Docther he said 'twas the hunger had kilt it; an' that was the case:
Ye could see thro' its wee bits of hands, an' its eyes were as big as its face.
An' whiles whin I 'm aitin' me crust, *I'll* be thinkin' to hear it cry—
But *she*, that's the mother who bore it—who'd blame her? In throth not I.
Och! but that was the terrible winther, an' like to ha' starved us outright;
Ne'er a hungrier saison I mind since the first o' the pratie blight;
An' whine'er wan 's no call to be hungry, it 's three times as hungry wan feels,
An' so I that worked never a sthroke, I did always be great at me meals.

Yet I spared thim the most that I could, for o' nights whin I noticed our heap
O' praties looked small in the pot, I 'd let on I was fast asleep ;
So Molly she 'd spake to the childher, an' bid thim to whisht an' be quite,
For if gran'daddy sted on asleep, he 'd be wantin' no supper that night ;
Thin, the crathurs, as cautious an' cute as the mice they 'd all keep whin they heard,
An' to think that the little childher 'd sit watchin', not darin' a word,
But hush-hushin' wan to the other, for fear I might happin to wake
And ait up their morsel o' food—sure me heart 'ud be ready to break.

IX

Thin I 'd think: 'There 's the House; ay, an thin they 'd be fewer to starve an' to stint';
Yet I hated the thought, an' kep' hopin' I 'd maybe be dead ere I wint.
But I 'm just afther hearin' this day what has settled me plans in me mind,
Like as if I had turned round me face; and I won't go a-lookin' behind.
I 'd been sthreelin' about in the slip at the back, whin I thought I 'd creep down
An' see what was up at M'Gurk's, for it 's weeks since I 've been in the town;
So round to the front I was come, an' the first thing that ever I seen
Was two gintlemen close to our door, an' a car standin' down the boreen.

And the wan o' the two was a sthranger, a stout little man, wid each square

O' the checks on his coateen the size of our own bit o' field over there;

Divil much to be lookin' at aither, tho' here the lads tould me as how

Twas no less than our Landlord himself, that we 'd never set eyes on till now.

For away off in England he lives, where they say he 's an iligant place

Wid big walls round it sevin mile long, and owns dozens of horses to race,

That costs him a fortin to keep; so whin all of his money is spint,

He sends word over here to the Agint; an' bids him make haste wid the rint.

An' the other 's the Agint, I know him; worse luck, I 've known many a wan,

An' it 's sorra much good o' thim all. I remember the carryin's on

We'd have in the ould times at home, whin we heard he was comin' his round:

For, suppose we'd a calf or a heifer, we'd dhrive her off into the pound,

Or if we'd a firkin of butther, we'd hide it away in the thatch.

Ay, bedad, if we'd even so much as an old hin a-sittin' to hatch,

We'd clap her in under the bed, out o' sight, for, mind you, we knew right well

He'd be raisin' the rint on us sthraight, if he spied that we'd aught to sell.

I 've heard tell there's a change in the law, an' the rint takes three Judges to fix,

So it isn't as aisy these times for an Agint to play thim bad thricks;

I dunno the rights of it clear, but all 's wan, for he would if he could;

And as soon as I seen him this day, I was sure he'd come afther no good.

But I slipped the wrong side o' the bank ere they heard me, an' there I sat still,
An' they came an' stood nigh it to wait, while their car crep' along up the hill.

X

And Turner, the Agint, looked back to the house: 'Well, yer Lordship,' he sez,
'That's a case for eviction; we'll scarce see a pinny while wan o' thim stez.
Why, they haven't a goose or a hin, let alone e'er a baste on the land,
So where we're to look for our money is more nor I understand.
But in coorse the man's axin' for time.' An' sez t' other, 'Confound him! in coorse—
'Tis their thrade to be axin' for that, if ye're axin' a pound for your purse.

They may have their damned time, sure, an' welcome, as long as they plase, on'y first
They'll pay up or clear out.' An' the Agint he laughed till ye'd think he'd ha' burst.
An' sez he, 'Thin "clear out" 'll be the word, and my notion's we'll find that it pays,
If we pull down thim ould sticks o' cabins, an' put in the cattle to graze;
Faith, I'd liefer see sheep on the land than the likes o' that breed any day,'
Sez he, pointin' his hand to the dyke, where the childher, poor sowls, were at play.
An' the Lord sez, 'It 's on'y a pity we can't git the lap of a wave
Just for wanst, o'er the whole o' the counthry; no end to the throuble 'twould save,
And lave the place *clane*.' An' the Agint laughed hearty; sez he: 'Our best start,
Since we can't git thim under the wather, is sendin' thim over it smart.

An' these Flynns here we 'd imigraph aisy ; they 've
several lads nearly grown ;
The on'y dhrawback 's the ould father, we 'll just
have to let him alone,
For the son sez he 's sheer past his work, an' that
niver 'ud do in the States ;
It 's a burthen he 's been on their hands for this
great while—he 'll go on the rates.
Sure, the Union 's the place for the likes of him, so
long as he bides above.'
But be this time their car had come by, an' up
wid thim, an' off they dhruv.

XI

I 'd ne'er ha' thought Patsy 'd say that ; an' he
didn't belike—I dunno—
But it 's on'y the truth if he did. A burthen ?
Bedad, I 'm so.

An' Pat, that's a rale good son, and has been all the days of his life,
It's the quare thanks I'm givin' him now, to be starvin' the childher and wife.
For I often considher a sayin' we have: 'Whin it's little ye've got,
It's the hunger ye'll find at the botthom, if many dip spoons in your pot.'
But if wanst they were shut o' meself, an' the Agint 'ud wait for a bit,
They might weather the worst o' the throuble, an' keep the ould roof o'er thim yit.
But suppose they're put out afther all, an' packed off to the divil knows where,
An' I up away in the House, I might never so happin to hear;
An' I'd liefer not know it for certin. Och! to think the ould place was a roon,
Wid nought left save the rims o' four walls, that the weeds 'ud be coverin' soon;

An' the bastes o' the field walkin' in ; an' the hole where the hearth was filled
Wid the briers ; an' no thrace o' the shed that I helped me poor father to build,
An' I but a slip of a lad, an' that plased to be handlin' the tools,
I 'most hammered the head off each nail that I dhruv. Och, it 's boys that are fools.

XII

'Tis sevin mile good into Westport ; I never could thramp it so far,
But Tim Daly dhrives there of a Friday ; he 'll loan me a sate on his car.
An' Friday 's to-morra, ochone ! so I 'm near now to seein' me last
O' Barney, an' Pat, an' the childher, an' all the ould times seem past.

I remimber the House goin' by it. It stands on
a bit of a rise,
Stone-black, lookin' over the lan', wid its windows
all starin' like eyes;
And it 's lonesome an' sthrange I 'll be feelin', wid
ne'er a frind's face to behould;
An' the days 'ill go dhreary an' slow. But I 'm
ould, plase God, I 'm ould.

BY THE BOG-HOLE

'Non omni somno securius exstat?'

BY THE BOG-HOLE

I

Ay, her people an' mine we lived next door at
the end o' the long boreen,
Afore it runs out on the breadth o' the bog where
the black land bates the green ;
An' Nelly's mother 'ud always give me a pleasant
word passin' thim by,
As I dhruv out our cow of a mornin', an' meself
scarce her showlder high.
An' Nelly she 'd crawl up the step, an' stump afther
me into the lane,
An' she 'd throt, callin' : '' Top, Dimmy, 'top ! ' for
she couldn't run sthraight, or spake plain ;

And her mother 'd say, 'Jimmy, me lad, if I trust her along wid ye, thin,

Keep your eye on her; mind the big hole; for your life don't be lettin' her in.'

So it 's many a day I 'd be keepin' me eye on the child an' the baste,

That had mostly a mind to be goin' wherever ye wanted thim laste;

An' th' ould cow 'd sthray away thro' the bog, if she couldn't find mischief to do

Thramplin' fences an' fields; but it 's Nelly herself was the worst o' the two.

For ere ever ye 'd know, there she 'd be like a scut of a rabbit a-creep—

She 'd creep faster thim whiles than she 'd walk—down the bank where the hole 's lyin' deep;

An' it 's thin I 'd the work o' the world to be catchin' her an' coaxin' her back,

Such a fancy she 'd tuk to the place, an' it lookin' so ugly an' black,

Wid its sides cut wall-sthraight wid the spade, an' the wather like midnight below,
Lyin' far out o' reach ; overhead all the storm-winds may blusther an' blow,
But 'tis still as a floor o' stone flags, an' its depth ye can't measure noways ;
Sure if Nelly had crep' o'er the edge, she 'd ha' crep' to the end of her days.

II

But the years wint till Nelly 'd more wit than to dhrown of herself in a hole,
An' meself was a size to git work in the fields ; yit, fair weather or foul,
Whin a holiday come we 'd be out rovin' round on the bog, she an' me,
For we always kep' frinds ; and it 's lonesome was Nell, since the mother, ye see,

Tuk an' died wan hard winter, worse luck—a bad
job for the little colleen—
And her brothers had gone to the States, and her
father was fond o' potheen,
And 'ud bide dhrinkin' dhrops down at Byrne's
till he hadn't a thought in his head;
So that, barrin' ould Granny an' me, all her
company 'd quit or was dead.

III

There's a bit of a hill rises up, right fornint the
big hole—the same sort
As ye'll count be the dozen in bogs, wid the grass
on't fine-bladed an' short,
An' the furzes an' broom in a ruffle a-top, an' flat
stones peepin' out,
Where it's pleasant to sit in the sun and be lookin'
around and about,

Whin the bog wid its stacks and its pools spreads
away to the rim o' the blue
That lanes over as clear as a glass, on'y somehow
wan ne'er can see thro'.
An' there 's plenty to mind, sure, if on'y ye look
to the grass at your feet,
For 'tis thick wid the tussocks of heather, an'
blossoms and herbs that smell sweet
If ye tread thim ; an' maybe the white o' the
bog-cotton waved in the win',
Like the wool ye might shear off a night-moth, an'
set an ould fairy to spin ;
Or wee frauns, each wan stuck 'twixt two leaves
on a grand little stem of its own,
Lettin' on 'twas a plum on a tree ; an' the briers
thrailed o'er many a stone
Dhroppin' dewberries, black-ripe and soft, fit to
melt into juice in your hould ;
An' the bare stones thimselves 'ill be dusted wid
circles o' silver an' gould—

Nelly called thim the moon an' the sun—an' grey
patches like moss that 's got froze,
Wid white cups in 't that take a red rim by the
time we 've the sheaves up in rows ;
I 'd be vexed whin they turned, for a sign that the
summer was slippin' away,
But poor Nelly was pleased wid the little bright
sthrakes growin' broader each day.

IV

So wan evenin'—I know if I think, 'twas whin
last they were cuttin' the oats,
Maybe four months from now, whin outside past
the bars there 's an odd snow-flake floats,
But it seems to me feelin' a world's breadth away,
and a life's lenth ago—
Well, the two of us sat on the hill, an' the sun was
about gettin' low,

An' there wasn't a ray on the lan', for the dhrift o' dark cloud overhead
Sthretched away like a roof, till just rimmin' the west ran the light in a thread,
Same as if 'twas a lid liftin' up on bright hinges; an' sorra a breath
Thro' the leaves or the grass, for the win' never stirred, an' 'twas stiller than death.
An' so Nelly 'd a poppy-bud pulled, wid the red all crased up in the green,
An' sat smoothin' its leaves on her lap, till ye saw its black heart in between;
An' her hair curlin' over the shine of her eyes, an' a smile on her mouth,
As I knew by the dint in her cheek turned aside from me. Sure 'twas the truth,
But I dunno for why of a suddint the notion come into me mind
That in all o' that bog-land it's Nell was the purtiest thing ye could find;

An' thinks I : 'Sure the slip of a lass, whin the days o' me life 'ill be dark,
Is the same as yon glame in the west that widout it has sorra a spark.'

V

But that instant he stepped round the end o' the turf-stack fornint the boreen,
Wid a scarlet to aquil the poppies ablaze on his bit o' coateen,
And his belts and his straps and his buckles as white an' as bright as could shine—
Whin a dragon-fly sits on the slant o' the sun he looks somethin' as fine—
Till he seemed to be lightin' a dazzle an' glitter each step that he stirred ;
And his little red cap set a-top wid a cock, like the crest of a bird,

And his spurs glancin' out at his heels, an' the stripes o' gold lace down his sleeve ;
And himself was just Felix Magrath comin' home to his father's on leave.

VI

The red-coats—I 'd seen thim at Christmas, when 'victions was down at Drumloe,
Standin' watchin' the ould folk an' childher put out in the flurries o' snow,
And it 's thin they looked bitther an' black as their powdher an' steel, man for man,
But—I 'll say that for Felix Magrath—find a pleasanter lad if ye can.
For he seemed somehow heartenin' things up, whin he stepped along sthraight as a dart,
Maybe twirlin' his bit of a stick to a tune like, that dacint an' smart

That ye 'd feel, clumpin' on be his side, like a quare sort o' raggety gawk.

Thin to hear him discoorse ; ye might listen from mornin' till night to his talk,

He 'd such stories of all he 'd beheld in thim lands where they fight wid the blacks,

Where the curiousest things ye could think do be plenty as turf-sods in stacks.

And he 'd medals that set him rememb'rin' wan day whin the guns let a roar

From the ridge o' the sandhills close by, where they 'd come since the evenin' before ;

An' it 's mountin' they all were next minute, an' waitin' the word o' command,

Wid his baste in a quiver to start, sthrainin' hard on the reins in his hand,

An' thim other lads passin' thim on to the front till their hearts were nigh broke,

Thramp an' thramp, wid the bands playin' march-tunes ahead thro' the booms in the smoke;

Thin the bugle rang out—Och, I 've ne'er heard
the like, yet wan aisy can tell
They 'd ha' lep' all the locked gates of Heaven to
ride wid that music to Hell.

VII

So if Nell tuk a pleasure in listenin', the same as
the rest o' thim, why
'Twas small blame to her; that 's what I said to
meself; but it seemed like a lie.
An' whine'er I come home from me work, an' seen
never a sowl be the hedge,
Where there 'd most whiles be Nelly to meet me,
but, happen, away on the edge
O' the hill-slope a pair standin' dark 'ginst the clear
o' the sunset, och thin
All the fire that was dead in the sky seemed flared
up to a burnin' agin

In the core o' me heart ; an' the first thing I knew
I 'd be rippin' an oath,
Wid me fingers clenched hard in a rage, like as if
they were grippin' his throath ;
An' I 'd swear to meself that whin wanst he was
parted from Nelly that night,
I 'd slip afther him back to his place, an' pervoke
him some way to a fight,
As I ready might do if I plased, an' no throuble
about it at all,
For it 's aisier risin' a quarrel than sthrikin' a match
on a wall.
An' bedad, if it come to that work, it 's meself
might be havin' the pull,
For I stood a head taller than he, and I 'd always
the strenth of a bull ;
An' 'twas likely enough, if I masthered him thin,
he 'd take off out o' this,
An' leave Nelly an' me to ourselves as if naught
had befallen amiss;

An' thin Nelly'd percaive there was more in the world than a gay bit o' red—

So thinks I to meself; but, sure, musha, wan's thoughts is like beads off a thread,

Slippin' each after each in a hurry: an' so I kep' considherin' on,

Till the next thought I had was if Nelly'd be fretted whin Felix was gone.

For I knew that the comfort was crep' from me life like the light from the day

Since she'd tuk up wid him; an' belike now if aught chanced that dhruv him away,

She'd be heart-broke. An' what call had I to go vex her wid comin' between,

Whin she'd liefer have him than meself in me shows of ould brogues an' caubeen?

'Divil take me,' sez I, 'thin it's schemin' I am to have Nelly to wake

Wid her heart every mornin' like lead, if there's lead that can thrimble and ache,

Wid no pleasure in aught, feelin' lonesome an' lost
in the world dhrear an' wild,
I might betther ha' left her to dhrown, an' she
on'y an imp of a child.'

VIII

But there 's whiles whin the throubles ye 're
dhreadin' seem comin' be conthrary ways,
An' ye 'll wondher what road ye should turn from
the worst till your mind 's in a maze,
Like me own, whin I heard what the neighbours
were sayin' o' Nelly. Bedad,
It 's the lasses were jealous I know—but they all
would go bail Magrath's lad
Was just foolin' the girl for the sake o' divarsion
as certin as fate,
Wid his slootherin' talk, and his thrapesin' afther
her early an' late,

Till she'd come to no good. Ay, mayhap, it
was nothin' but envy an' spite,
Yet it seemed to meself whin the neighbours called
Felix a rogue, they said right;
An' thin Nell 'd got no mother to mind her. I
couldn't tell what to be at,
For if all that they talked was the truth, I 'd ha'
choked him as soon as a rat;
But the truth was as hard to piece out as a page
whin the half of it 's torn;
An' I 'd think 'twixt us both Nell might fare like
a little white rose on the thorn,
That two childher 'll be scufflin' an' tusslin' to grab,
'cause it 's purty an' sweet,
Till its laves is shook off in a shower, an' throd
down in the dust at their feet.

IX

An' thim evenin's I felt to be hatin' whatever I seen or I heard,
So I 'd slinge away into the house, where I 'd nowan to give me a word,
An' the corners is black at noonday. But I couldn't shut out o' me sight
How the west where the sun had gone by would be swimmin' brimful wid clear light,
An' as fast as it dhrained off the stars 'ud be slippin' this side o' the sky,
Like the rain-dhrops that rowl down and hang from the blade-points; it 's Nelly and I
'Ud be watchin' thim many a time; an' sure now she was watchin' wid *him*,
An' what differ to her? But a wolf whin he 's tearin' a man limb from limb

Might ha' frindlier feelin's than me, whin I fancied
the two o' thim there,
Sthrollin' aisy, while Felix 'd be stickin' red poppies
in Nelly's black hair,
As I seen him wan evenin', or pullin' her kingcups
along be the pool,
An' they both talkin' low, an' it 's like enough
laughin' at me for a fool
That had tuk off to sulk be himself. I 'd ha' sworn
I was hearin' him laugh ;
An' I wanst grabbed me blackthorn that laned be
the wall, an' I snapped it in half
Like a withy, ere I knew what I done, and it thick
as your wristbone. An' thin
There 'd be Granny, that sat on the step wid her
knittin', would keep peerin' in,
Thinkin' maybe I 'd speak to her pleasant some
while ; for the crathur was scared,
An' she dursn't so much as be askin' what ailed
me ; but little I cared,

Or it 's plased in a manner I was wid the notion
I 'd somebody vexed ;
An' I 'd often scarce open me lips, good or bad,
from wan light till the next.
Och, but slow wint the time, an' I crouched in the
dark like a baste in his lair,
Ragin' crueler than bastes, barrin' divils. Sure
mad ye 'd go, mad wid despair,
If ye hadn't the thought that the end o' the end,
whatsoe'er may befall,
Is nought else save a paice and a quiet, where
ye 'll disremember it all.

X

Well, wan night, comin' home agin sundown, I
met wid some girls at the gate
Beyant Reilly's, an' Biddy O'Loughlin : 'Och
Jimmy,' sez she, 'man, ye 're late ;

For we seen thim just now, passin' by near the pool at the fut o' the hill,
Your sweetheart an' *her* sweetheart, thick as two thieves. Ye might find thim there still,
If ye stirred yourself,' sez she. Sez I: 'Find a sweetheart, me lass, o' your own,
And it 's thin ye 'll be maybe contint to let other folks' sweethearts alone.'
So sez I; but I thought to meself I 'd turn back be the way that I came,
An' keep out o' the sight o' the hole. But it 's there I wint sthraight all the same.

XI

There were showers about on the bog, an' the blast risin' up wid a keen
Dhruv the wet in me eyes as I come towards the hole till the slope falls between;

And I tuk a look round, sharp an' quick, as ye 'd
touch a red coal wid your hand—
Ne'er a sign of him—nowan but Nell—sure a light
seemed to slip o'er the land.
But it 's kneelin' she was on the edge, stoopin'
low o'er the blackness widin,
And I called to her: 'Mind yourself, Nell!' for
to see her ran could thro' me skin.
But wid that she lept up to her feet, an' just ready
she stood for a spring,
Never liftin' her eyes from the wather. So sthraight
as a stone from a sling
I was down the hill-side, an' I dhragged her away,
tho' it 's past what ye 'd think
How she sthrove in me arms; I was hard set to
hold her off safe from the brink.
Thin she tuk to stan' still of a suddint, an' sez to
me soft like an' low:
'For the love o' the Mother o' Mercy, don't be
keepin' me, lad, let me go.'

An' sez I to her: 'Nelly, me darlint, I 've made up
me mind in the nights
That I 'd give ye to Felix Magrath; for, sure, how
should I grudge you by rights,
If it 's him your heart 's set on? I 'll keep meself
quite; there 's no more to be said.
But yon ugly black hole—och, it 's often I 've
promised your mother that 's dead
I 'd ne'er let that git hold o' ye. Time and agin
I 'll ha' hauled ye along
Up this bank, an' ye fightin' as fierce as a kitten,
an' nearly as sthrong,
And abusin' me all ye could think, in the rage o'
ye. Now, be me sowl,
I 'd not keep ye from wan that was pleasant an'
kind, but I 'll chate the black hole.'
So sez I; but sez she wid a cry that was like a
wild bird's on the air:
''Tis to Felix I 'm goin', to Felix, that 's lyin' an'
dhrownin' down there.'

XII

Och, the world gave a reel; och, the words
meant no more than the thunderclaps mane,
Thro' the roar in me ears, till I saw thim black
sods that were soft wid the rain
All fresh thrampled, an' scrawmed on the edge were
the prints left where somewan had gript
For dear life wid his fingers—God help him whin
heavy he grew, an' they slipt,
And he dug his nails hard—an' they slipt. An' in
Nelly's own bit of a hand,
That I 'd caught, was a scrap o' gold lace; an'
his cap wid its bright-shinin' band
Hung there waved on a brier; but the wather
lay smooth. An' sez I: 'In God's name,
What was that ye said, Nelly?' An' sez she:
''Twas but now; he was here whin I came.

An' sez he, whin the rain-dhrops began: "Now the fine weather 's broke, I 'll be sworn,
But it 's lasted as long as me leave, for I 'm off to the Curragh the morn."
So sez I: "Is it that soon ye 'll be goin'?" An' sez he: "Sure, if longer I 'd stay,
What at all would the wife there be doin'? She 'd think that I 'd scooted away;
Och, it 's ragin' she 'd be like the mischief. But, Nelly," sez he, "wife or no,
Ye 're the purtiest girl I e'er seen, an' ye 'll give me a kiss ere I go."
But I pushed him away, and I sez: "Ne'er a kiss ye 'll be gittin' from me."
An' I turned to run home, an' the sky 'd grown so dark that I scarcely could see.
Thin he tuk a step back—sure belike he forgot he stood close to the bank—
An' he fell, an' he held to the edge, but he dhropped in the wather an' sank.

An' he 's dhrownin'—leave go o' me, Jimmy—ye stookawn—I 'd aisy jump down—

It 's your fau't if ye hinder me savin' him—your doin' for lettin' him dhrown,

That 's me sweetheart. Och, Felix,' sez she, ' I 'd give body an' sowl for your life,

Felix darlint.' I knew it afore, yet to hear her seemed twistin' a knife

That was stuck in me heart. But I held her the closer. I 've learnt since I 've thried

How a man can hold Heaven an' Hell in wan grip. Thin most piteous she cried,

An' she snatched her two hands out o' mine to her throat, an' seemed gaspin' for breath,

An' her head dhrooped aside, an' she lay in me arms like the image o' death.

XIII

But 'tis all in a mist afther thin. First the neighbours come plutherin' round,
Callin' wan to the other that Nelly was dead, an' that Felix was dhrowned.
An' the pólis thramped black thro' the glames of a moon that was takin' to rise,
An' thin somebody said: 'Sure he's murthered her sweetheart before the girl's eyes.'
Was it that set the win' howlin' 'Murther!' all over the land in the dark?
An' they axed me a power o' questions, an' fitted me fut in a mark
On the bank. But it's little I heeded whatever they'd do or they'd say,
For thin Nelly was come to her sinses, an' ravin' an' moanin' away,

An' kep' biddin' thim hinder me dhrownin' the lad in the hole be the hill.

So sez I to meself whin I heard her: 'I 'll let thim believe what they will.

I 'll say naught, an' the kinder they 'll thrate her belike.' So I just held me tongue.

An' some chaps began booin' an' shoutin' the villin 'd a right to be hung.

An' his mother wint callin' him soft, lettin' on he was hid for a joke;

But th' ould father I 'd seen shake his fist at me over the heads o' the folk:

Troth, as long as the life 's in me body he 'll ne'er git a minute o' paice.

And I seen Granny mopin' about wid the fright puckered up in her face.

Och, she 'll starve, now, the crathur, she 'll starve; that 's the throuble I 'm lavin' behind.

Did I see? I 'm scarce certin, but since, I 'll be seein' it oft in me mind,

What they dhrew up all dhrippin', up out o' the
wather that shivered an' spun
In black rings, hauled up slow like a log, stiff an'
stark, an' laid down where the sun
Was just rachin' to twinkle the dew on the grass.
Whin ye looked where that lay,
All the world seemed no more than a drift o' deep
night round a hand's-breadth o' day.
But it 's clearer I see him come stepped thro' the
sunset in glimmers o' gould,
Than that wanst, sthretched his lenth there, stone-
still, wid thim black snaky weeds, wet an' could,
Thrailin' round him. Her darlint, her darlint—I
hear that asleep and awake;
I 'd a right to quit hearin' it now, whin he 'll listen
no more than she 'll spake.

XIV

For they tould me this day little Nelly had died
o' the fever last night,
An' the frettin'; so nothin' that matthers a
thraneen 's left under the light.
What 's the differ if people believe 'twas meself
shoved him into the pool?
They can't help her or harm her. But, faith, sir,
ye 'll think me a powerful fool,
Or ye 'd scarce have the face to be biddin' me
spake out the truth now, afore
Tis too late; an' yourself sittin' there tellin' lies
this last half-hour an' more,
Wid your little black book full o' blatheremskyte
as its leaves is o' print;
Sure, I 'd heard all your stories; an' sorra a wan
ye 've the wit to invint

That 'ill show folk the sinse o' the life where they've come, an' the death where they'll go,
If there's sinse in't at all; wan thing's certin: it isn't the likes o' yez know—
Wid your chapels an' churches, Heaven walled up in each, an' Hell's blazes all round.
Och, the Divil *I* keep is contint plaguin' crathurs that bide above ground,
Widout blatherin' afther thim into the dark; that's the Divil for me;
Tho' he wouldn't suit you, sir: the folk's aisier frighted wid things they can't see.
But just leave me in paice wid your glory an' joy—they're as bad as the rest.
If there's anythin' manes me a good turn at all, let it give me what's best—
The great sleep, that's all sleep, ne'er a fear wan could wake, ne'er a thought to creep in;
Ne'er a dhrame—or I'd maybe hear Nelly call Felix her darlint agin.

PAST PRAYING FOR

OR, THE SOUPER'S WIDOW

'*Horribili super aspectu mortalibus instans.*'

PAST PRAYING FOR

OR, THE SOUPER'S[1] WIDOW

(A.D. 184—)

I

SURE he 'd never ha' done it, not he, if I 'd on'y
but held o' me tongue;
Och, the fool that I was, the black fool—for the
same I 'd deserve to be hung;
But, bedad thin, the tongue o' ye 's harder than
aught in the world else to hould,
An' that mornin' we all was disthracted an'
perished wid hunger an' could.

[1] *Souper* is a term applied to the few Irish Catholic peasants who, during famine years, professed Protestantism in order to obtain the relief, often intrusted for distribution to the clergy of the then Established Church, who occasionally made a grant conditional upon attendance at their services, etc., though as a rule acting impartially and humanely.

II

It was right in the worst o' the famine, the first years the praties wint black—
Tho' ye 're scarce of an age, Sisther Frances, to remember o' things so far back ;
But in coorse ye 've heard tell o' thim times, whin the people was dyin' be the score,
Ay, be hundrids an' thousinds, the like was ne'er seen in the counthry before.
An' what else should the crathurs ha' done, wid the food o' thim rotted to dirt?
Och, to see thim—ye 'd meet ne'er a man but his face was as white as his shirt.
And ourselves had been starved all the winther, the childher, an' Micky, an' me,
An' poor Micky's ould mother, till, comin' on spring, not a chance could we see ;

For there wasn't a house far or near where they 'd
give ye the black o' your eye,
And our Praste he was down wid the fever, an'
clane ruinated forby.

III

So it 's rale delighted we were on that evenin'
Pat Murphy brought word
How the people o' Lunnon had sint some relief to
our townland he heard ;
Relief—that was oatmale, an' loaves, an' a grand
sup o' broth in a bowl,
An' to git it ye 'd stip down to Parson, who 'd tuk
to disthribit the whole.
So full early we started next day, sin' the road 's
a long sthretch to his place,
An' we hadn't a scrap in the house but a crust for
the childher. And in case

We got out the big bag for the male, Mick an' I, while the rest, lookin' on,

Did be wishin' we'd bring it back full, an' a-wondhrin' how long we'd be gone.

Sure, the laste o' thim all, little Larry, that scarce was a size to run sthraight,

Tuk a notion to come wid us too, whin he heard 'twas for somethin' to ait.

I remember the look of it yit, skytin' afther us the lenth o' the lane.

Thin I mind, comin' into the town, meetin' cart-loads and cart-loads o' grain,

That Lord Athmore was sindin' in sthrings to be shipped off from Westport by say ;

An' the people stood watchin' thim pass like as if 'twas a corpse on its way.

An' sez Mick, whin we met thim : 'Look, Norah,' sez he, 'that's not aisy to stand :

It's the lives of our childher th' ould naygur's a-cartin' off out o' the land.'

An' sez I, just to pacify Mick : 'Thin good luck to
the folks as ha' sint
What 'ill keep o' the sowls in their bodies ; if we
can but do that I 'm contint.'

IV

But, och, Sisther darlin', at Parson's we got sorra
a bit afther all ;
Not a taste in the world save the smell o' the soup
that was sthrong in the hall.
For whin Parson come out from his breakfast, he
said the relief that he 'd got
Was for thim who wint reg'lar to church—where
he 'd ne'er seen a wan of our lot ;
An' he 'd liefer throw bread to the dogs than to
childher o' papists, whose thricks
Were no better than haythins', brought up to be
worshippin' ould bits o' sticks.

Howsome'er, if we 'd give him our word we 'd attind
the next Sunday, why thin
He 'd considher. But who could ha' promised the
like? Such a shame and a sin :
Turn a souper in sight o' thim all, an' throop off to
the place where they curse
The ould Pope, an' the Virgin, an' jeer at the Mass
—why, what haythin 'd do worse?
Yet that hape o' big loaves. Sisther Frances, thim
folk 's in a manner to blame
Who know whin ye 're starvin' an' tempt ye. So
we wint back the way that we came.
But, ochone, it seemed double the lenth, an' it 's
never a word Micky said,
An' the ould empty bag on me arm was that light
it felt heavy as lead ;
An' the childher, that ran out to meet us as far as
the top o' the hill,
Whin they found we 'd brought nothin' at all—I
could cry now to think o' thim still.

V

An' twyst afther that Mick wint down there to thry if a bit could be had,
But onless that we promised to turn, not a scrapeen we 'd git good or bad.
Och, the long hungry days. So wan mornin' we 'd ate all the breakfast o'er night,
And I hoped we 'd be late wakin' up, but it seemed cruel soon gittin' light.
An' the March win' was ice, an' the sun on'y shinin to show it its road,
An' the fire was gone out on us black, an' no turf till wan thramped for a load.
Thin the childher, an' Mick's mother herself, were that starvin', the crathurs, an' could,
That they all fell to keenin' together most woeful, the young an' the ould ;

Until Mick, that was lyin' in bed for the hunger, an' half the week long
Had scarce tasted a bit, he laned up on his elbow to ax what was wrong.
An' sez I—God forgive me, 'twas just the first thing that come into me head—
'Sure it's cryin' they are, man,' sez I, 'for the want of a mouthful o' bread,
And it's dyin' they may be next thing, for what help I can see. Och, it's quare,
But if Parson had knowed how we're kilt, an' ye'd on'y ha' spoken him fair,
He'd allow us a thrifle at laste.' An' sez he: 'Woman, whisht! what's the use?
I might spake him as fair as ye plase, or might give him the heighth of abuse,
All as wan, he's that bitther agin us. But throth will I stand it no more;
I'll turn souper this day for the male.' And he ups wid himself off the floor;

For 'twas Sunday that mornin', worse luck: 'It's
a sin, sure,' sez he, 'I know well,
'Siver, sooner than watch thim disthroyed, I 'd say
prayers to the Divil in Hell,'
Sez he, goodness forgive him—but, mind you,
meself's every ha'porth as bad,
For thin, watchin' him off down the lane, I dunno
was I sorry or glad.

VI

And he wint, sure enough, to the church.
Widdy Mahon she tould me next day
How she 'd gone there herself for the victuals, an'
met wid him comin' away;
And how afther the service they stepped up to
Parson's to thry what they 'd git,
An' they got a half loaf, an' the full o' the male-
bag; an' never a bit

Would he touch, but made off wid him sthraight,
tho' she said he seemed hard-set to crawl—
Och, ye see 'twas for us that he turned, for himself he'd ne'er do it at all.
An' it's wishful he was to slip home in a hurry, poor lad, wid his pack,
An' to bring us the best that he had. But och, Sisther, he never got back.

VII

For the boys comin' up from the Mass down at Moyna, a while later on,
Found him dhropped of a hape be the path past Kilogue wid the life of him gone;
An' th' ould male-bag gripped close in his hand, that he thought to ha' carried us home.
Och, I mind it, the place where he lay, 'tis the lonesomest road ye can roam,

Wid the bog black an' dhreary around ye, an' sorra a wall or a hedge,
Sthretchin' out till the hill-top lifts up like a fearful great face o'er the edge;
An' the breadths o' the big empty sky, wid no end, look as far as ye will,
Seem just dhrawin' an' dhrainin' your life out, if weak-like ye're feelin' an' ill;
An' it's that way poor Mick was. Och, Sisther, there's scarcely a day's gone by
In the years ever since, but I'm thinkin' how desolit he happint to die,
And I dhrame it o' nights—be himself, starin' lonesome an' lost 'nathe thim skies,
Wid the could creepin' into his heart, an' the cloud comin' over his eyes,
An' that sin on his sowl—would ye say there's a chance for him? Look, now, at me,
Wid a bed to die aisy on here in the House, betther off, sure, than he,

An' me fau't just as bad. Cock me up! to lie
here where I 've help widin call,
An' poor Mick out o' rache on the road—where 's
the manin' or sinse in 't at all?

VIII

Ay, in troth, 'twas no thing to go do; ay, a
scandal it was and a sin;
But mayhap they 'd scarce judge him so hard if
they knew all the sthraits we were in.
There 's the Mother o' Mercy, sez I to meself, sure,
it 's childher she 's had—
May they ne'er want the bite or the sup, if she 'll
spake a good word for me lad.
Och, me head 's gittin' doitered an' quare, or I 'd
know they 've tuk off out o' this,
And is settled in glory above, where there 's
nought can befall them amiss.

But suppose she remembers her time down below,
if she even lived where
The ould blight never come on their praties an'
dhruv the whole land to despair,
Yet I'm thinkin' there's always been plenty o'
throuble about on this earth,
An' for sure 'twill ha' happint her whiles to ha'
never a sod on the hearth,
Or a scrap for the pot, an' the childher around
her all famished an' white,
An' they cryin', an' she nothin' to give them, save
bid them to whisht an' be quite.

IX

But, indeed, for that matther, the Lord, who'd
enough to contind wid those times,
Might ha' some sort o' notion himself how the
poor people's tempted to crimes,

Whin they're watchin' their own folk a-starvin',
an' no help for it, strive as they may.
For himself set a dale by his mother, accordin' as
I've heard say,
An' remembered her last thing of all in the thick
of his throuble, an' thought
To make sure she'd ha' some wan to care her an'
heed that she wanted for nought,
An' be keepin' the roof o'er her head while she
lived, all the same as her son—
But, ye see, he'd a frind he could trust to, an'
Micky, the crathur, had none.
An' that same would be vexin' his heart while he
lay dyin' there on the road;
For the sorra a sowl would be left in the world to
purtect us, he knowed;
An' I mind when the fever he had, an' was
wandh'rin' a bit in his head,
He kep' ravin' continyal as how 'twas desthroyed
we'd be wanst he was dead.

An' poor Mick was that kind in his heart, he'd
be put past his patience outright
Whin th' ould mother an' childher was frettin' wid
hunger from mornin' till night;
An' it's that was the raison he done it—nought
else. So, belike, if above
They'd considher the hardships he met, till it s'
desprit, bedad, he was dhruv,
An' no hope o' relief for the crathurs at home,
mind you, barrin' he wint
An' let on a bit now an' agin—they'd believe
'twas no harm that he mint;
An' that wan sin he done, an' he starvin', they'd
maybe forgive an' forget—
Och, Sisther Frances, me honey, would ye say
there's a chance for him yet?

MISS HONOR'S WEDDING

Οἷόν μ'ἀκούσαντ' ἀρτίως ἔχει, γύναι,
Ψυχῆς πλάνημα κἀνακίνησις φρενῶν.

MISS HONOR'S WEDDING

I

Ould Sir Maurice's youngest daughther, do I
mind her, Sir, did ye say?
Miss Honor is it? Och, sure the same as I 'd seen
her but yistherday;
And her weddin'—Ay, Sir, her weddin' I said.
How long since? Well, I dunnó,
But a matter o' ten year back belike; anyway 'tis
wan while ago.

II

We thought little enough o' the match here
below in the town; people said
Miss Honor 'd a right to ha' looked at home, if so
be she 'd a mind to wed.

There was plinty o' betther than he did be afther her thin, ye 'll be bound,

An' she reckoned the greatest beauty in the sevin counties around.

Yet she needs must take up wid a sthranger; I believe 'twas from Scotland he came.

No, Sir, I ne'er chanced to behould him, and I disremember his name—

A big man, I 've heard tell, as yourself's, Sir, an' pleasant o' speech, but a bit

Conthráry some whiles in his temper, an' come of a quare wild set.

Not aquil no ways to Miss Honor: sure, whin she 'd be ridin' the road,

As many 's the time I 've seen her, be the look of her no wan 'd ha' knowed

Whether 'twas to the Earl, or the Countess, or ould Andy the fiddler she bowed;

A rale lady, tho', mind ye, some Quality thought her proud.

III

Howsomever, a sthranger or no, ould Sir Maurice
was plased an' content,
An' they settled to have a great weddin' down
here at the endin' o' Lent ;
An' I mind the white sloe-flower was meltin' from
off the black hedges like hail
In the sunshine, whin back to the Castle the family
came wid a dale
O' grand company, frinds an' relations ; the house
was as full as a fair.
But, a couple o' days to the weddin', Kate Doyle,
that 's in service up there,
She run in wid a message to say they 'd a kitchen-
maid tuk to her bed
Wid the awfulest toothache at all, an' her check
swelled the size of her head ;

An' they wanted a girl be the week, an' she 'd spoke
to the misthress for me—
So I slipped up that night afther supper, as proud
o' me luck as could be.

IV

Thin next day, whin they 'd gone to the dinner,
Kate showed me the grandeur they 'd got
Settled out in the library; all of her presents, a
terrible lot.
Sure, I couldn't be tellin' ye half, let alone nigh the
whole o' the things.
There was wan o' the tables was covered wid brace-
lets an' brooches, an' rings;
An' the big silver plates did be shinin' like so
many moons thro' the mist;
An' the jugs wid their insides pure gold, an' the
taypots, an' urns, an' the rist.

But the iligant chiney—och saints! the wee cups
wid their handles all gilt,
An' their paintin's o' flower-wrathes an' birds—if
ye'd break wan, bedad, ye'd be kilt.
An' the jewels, och, the jewels was that purty, I'd
ha' sted there star-gazin' all night;
There was diaminds like raindhrops that each had
a fire-sparkle somehow alight,
An' the pearls like as if they'd been stringin' the
bits o' round hailstones for beads,
An' the red wans an' green, if a rainbow was sowin'
ye'd take thim for seeds;
An' the grand little boxes to hold thim, all lined
wid smooth satin below—
'Sure, it's well to be her, Kate,' sez I, an' sez she,
'Och, begorra, that's so.'

V

Well, the morn, be the best o' good luck, Kate
an' I got the chance to slip out,
An' away wid us off to the church, where the folk
was all standin' about,
Tho' it wanted an hour to the time; an' we
squeezed to a sate at the door,
That was thrailed round most tasty wid wrathes
that they 'd put up the evenin' before.
An' it 's there we 'd the greatest divarsion be-
holdin', for afther a while,
All the guests was arrivin' an' roostlin' in velvets
an' silks up the aisle,
Every wan lookin' finer than t' other, wid sthramers
an' feathers an' lace—
But the sorra a sign o' the bridegroom was seen
comin' nigh to the place.

That was sthrange now ; an' folk did be sayin'
they wondhered what kep' him, an' thin
It seemed Quality's selves got onaisy, for ye 'd
see the grand bonnits begin
Niddle-noddin' together to whisper ; an' wan o' the
gintlemen 'd quit,
Slippin' out be the little side door, an' look down
the sthraight road for a bit,
An' come back, blinkin' out o' the sun, wid a head-
shake, for nothin' he 'd spied ;
Till at last, in the heighth o' their throuble, in
landed Miss Honor—the bride.

VI

Och, an' she was a bride! Not a sowl but was
wishin' good luck to her groom.
All in white, like a branch o' wild pear, when ye
scarce see the stem for the bloom,

An' her dark hair just glintin' wid glames, like the bird's wing that sthrakes off the dew—
Och, a beauty complate, from the crown of her head to the point of her shoe.
Wid her hand on Sir Maurice's arm, an' he lookin' as proud as ye plase,
An' eight iligant bridesmaids behind her, each pair dhressed as like as two pase,
Wid their booquees o' flowers like big stars in a thrimble o' fern laves; ye'd say
Be the scint they'd dhropped straight out of Heaven; I remember the smell to this day.

VII

But, next minute, in afther thim stepped a sthrange gintleman none of us knew,
In a terrible takin', an' pantin' as if 'twas a bellers he blew;

Wid a yallerish slip in his hand o' the sort they 've
for messages tuk
Off the tiligrumph wires, an' he ups to where
Quality stared at him, sthruck
Of a heap like; and somethin' he sez, that I
couldn't exactually hear,
But a somethin' the others weren't wishful Miss
Honor should guess, that was clear,
For they all wint hush-hushin'; however, I 'm
thinkin' she heard what he said,
And I saw her take hold o' the paper, an' what-
ever was in it she read.

VIII

I misdoubt what 's the thruth o' the story.
Some said all the while he 'd a wife
In the States unbeknownst, that was somehow
found out, so he 'd run for his life;

An' some said he was coortin' a Marquis's
daughther in England instead;
But some said it was nought on'y just a fantigue
he'd tuk into his head.
But whatever the raison might be, an' whatever
had happint amiss,
The end of it was, he was never set eyes on from
that day to this.

IX

Sure now, Quality 's quare in their ways; when
me cousin ran off to inlist,
Troth, the bawls of his mother an' sisthers were
fit to ha' frighted the best;
An' last winther whin Norah Macabe had heard
tell that her sweetheart was dhrowned,
It's her scrames 'ud ha' terrified nations—ye'd
hear thim a good mile o' ground.

But Miss Honor, as still and as quiet she turned
back be the way that she came,
Down the aisle, past the pews wid the people set
starin' in rows just the same;
An' right out to the shine o' the sun, that should
never ha' lit on her head
Till she walked wid a ring on her hand, an' the
girls sthrewin' flowers where she'd thread.
So she passed thro' the yard, where the folk all
kep' whisht as the dead in their graves,
Not a sound in the world save the flutther o' win'
thro' the ever-green laves,
An' a lark somewhere singin' like wild up above
in the high light alone;
Till the carriage dhruv off from the gate, an' we
heard the wheels grate on the stone.
Thin ould Molly O'Rourke, that stood by wid her
head in her raggety cloak:
'Now, the Saints may purtect her,' sez she, 'for
the heart of the crathur is broke.'

X

An' sure maybe ould Molly was right; I dunno, for they tuk her away,
To disthract of her mind, so they said, to some counthries far over the say;
Some most curious onnathural place, where I'm tould the sun's scorchin' an' hot
All the year, an' the people is mostly ould nay-gurs as black as the pot,
An' a sthrame thro' it full o' thim bastes o' great reptiles that swally ye whole,
Wid the desolit deserts around, where ye'll see ne'er the sight of a soul;
Worser land than the blackest o' bogs, just as bare as the palm o' your hand,
Savin' whiles barbarocious big imiges stuck in the midst o' the sand,

An' gazabos o' stones stuffed wid bones of the hayjus ould haythins inside—

Ay, in Aygypt—belike that 's the name. But, at all evints, there she died.

XI

Yis, she died, sir; an' there she was buried, she never set fut here agin;

An' it 's nought but the truth that her like I 've not looked on afore her or sin'.

An' bad luck, thin, to thim that 'ud harm her. A pity—a pity, bedad,

If ye come to considher the pleasure in life she 'd a right to ha' had.

'Tis the same as a rose-bud that 's torn whin its red 's just the brightest to see;

Or a linnet shot dead twitterin' soft be its bit of a nest in the tree—

So, in spring, whin the hedges is greenin', an' cuckoos beginnin' to call,

Poor Miss Honor I mind, an' her weddin', that was never a weddin' at all.

A CURLEW'S CALL

Ἔκλυον ἂν ἐγὼ οὐδ' ἂν ἤλπισ' αὐδάν

A CURLEW'S CALL

I

WHETHEN is it yourself, Mister Hagan? an' lookin' right hearty you are;
'Tis a thrate to behold you agin. You 'll be waitin' to take the long car
For Kilmoyna, the same as meself, sir? They 're late at the cross-roads to-night,
For I mind when the days 'ud be long, they 'd be here ere the droop of the light,
Yet out yonder far over the bog there 's the sunset beginnin' to burn
Like the red of a camp-fire raked low, and no sign of thim roundin' the turn.

So the dark 'll git ahead of us home on this jaunt;
we 've good ten mile to go,
And thin afther the rain-pours this mornin', we 're
apt to be draggin' an' slow—
Ay, you 're right, sir: alongside the road I 've been
thravellin' you 'd scarce count that far;
You 'll cross dark an' light times and agin between
Creggan and Kandahar.

II

And is Norah along wid you? Well, Norah
jewel, how 's yourself all this year?
Sure she 's thin grown and white, sir, to what I
remember her last time we were here.
Took a could in the spring? Ah, begorrah, the
March win' 's as bad as a blight;
But the weather we git in Afghanistan, troth,
'twould destroy her outright.

For in summer Ould Horny seems houldin' the
earth in the heat of his hand,
And in winther the snow's the great ghost of a
world settled down on the land,
Wid a blast keenin' over it fit to be freezin' the
sun where he shone ;
If they'd lease you that counthry rint-free, you'd
do righter to let it alone.

III

Glad enough to be out of it? Well, in a way,
but I've this on me mind,
That I'm come like the winther's worst day, after
lavin' me betthers behind ;
An' the nearer I git to the ould place at home, it's
the stranger I seem,
Missin' thim I'll behold there no more till me
furlough I take in a dream.

But the divil a dream 's in it now, and I 'd liefer
dream ugly than think
What Jack Connolly's folk 'ill remember whinever
they notice the blink
Of me coat past their hedge, and I goin' their
road. Jack's poor mother belike
'Ill be feedin' her hins in the door, or else gath'rin'
her clothes at the dyke,
And it 's down to the gate she 'll be runnin' and
callin', an' biddin' me step in ;
And she 'll say to me : ' Well, Dan, you 're home,
and I 'm glad, sure, to see you agin.'
Quare an' glad, I 'll be bound, wid the thought in
her heart of how long she might wait,
Ere she 'd see her own slip of a redcoat come
route-marchin' in at her gate ;
He that 's campin' apart from us, joined wid the
throop who shift quarters no more ;
Crep' in under the tent that 's wide worlds beyond
call, tho' 'twas pitched at your door.

Ah, the crathur: 'tis poor bits of hope folk take up wid whin luck 's turnin' bad.

She that not so long since 'ud be thinkin' she 'd soon git a sight of the lad,

There she 'll stand wid her eyes on me face, till I see all as plain 's if I heard

How she 's wond'rin', an' dhreadin' to ask, have I brought her so much as a word.

That 's the notion 's come home wid me; faix, I get thinkin' it every odd while,

Maybe oft as a lamed horse shrinks his fut in the lenth of a stony mile.

You 'll remember Jack Connolly, sir? Ay for sure, 'tis good neighbours you 've been

Since he wasn't the height of your stick, and meself but a bit of spalpeen.

Great the pair of us both were; out most whiles off over the bog and away,

But the end of it happint us yonder at sunset last Pathrick's Day.

IV

The way of it? Our picket was ridin' in be the
wall of the little white town,
That's stuck like a blaiched wasps' nest in the gap
where the ridge of the hills breaks down,
And the big flat plain spreads out and about, you
might say 'twas a bog gone dhry,
Lookin' nathural enough till you notice, pricked
up 'gin the light in the sky,
Their two thin towers, like an ould snail's horns be
the shell of their haythin dome,
Peerin' out of a purpose to put you in mind where
you 've thravelled from home.
We were ridin' too close; I remember along on the
white of the wall
The front men's helmets went bob, bob, bob, in
blue shadow, sthretched won'erful tall,

For the sunbames were raichin' their furthest aslant
from the edge of the day,
Where the light ran, dhrained over the earth, like
a wave turnin' back to the say,
All hot gold. Howane'er, when we past where
their straight-archin' door opened black,
Wid the dust-thracks they thramp into roads
glamin' in at it, off went a crack,
And ere ever an echo got rappin' the hills, or the
smoke riz to float,
'Twas a plunge, and a thud, and Jack Connolly
down wid him, shot in the throat.

V

So be raison of we two bein' neighbours, they
bid me mind Jack while they went
To make out what the mischief at all the rap-
scallion that potted him meant;

Some ould objic' wisped up in his rags head and fut, the crow's notice to quit,
Wid a quare carabine 'ud scarce fright e'er a bird who 'd a scrumption of wit.
But 'twas able enough for that job, and be hanged to it ; Jack's business was done,
As you couldn't misdoubt. All the west swam clear fire round the smooth, redhot sun,
Dropped down steady as a shell thro' still wather, but 'twouldn't be sunk out of sight,
Ere the lad had got finished wid dyin', and gone beyond darkness and light.
And between whiles 'twas divil a much could I do to be helpin' him ; just
Keep beside him, and dhrive the black fly-buzz, and lift up his head from the dust,
And hear tell had he aught in his mind. But, och man, if his heart was to break,
Every whisper of voice he had in him was kilt, not a word could he spake.

Sure now that was conthrary. An instant before
'twas no odds what he said,
And he 'd laughed, and he 'd gabbed on galore,
any blathers come into his head ;
But wid on'y a minit to hold all his speech in for
ever and a day,
Just one breath of a word like a hand raichin'
worlds' worlds an' years' years away,
'Tis sthruck dumb he was, same as his crathur of a
baste that stood watchin' us there,
Wid big eyes shinin' fright, and snuff-snuffin' the
throuble up out of the air.

VI

'Twas a throuble swep' nearer, an' blacker, an'
surer ; the whole world stood still ;
You 'd as aisy turn back a cloud's shadow, that 's
tuk to slide over a hill.

There was Jack wid the life failin' out of him fast as the light from the sky,
That came fingerin' the grass wid long rays, blade be blade, an' thin twinklin' up high
On the gold spark atop their green dome. And I thought to meself how the same
Blamed ould sunset 'ud thrapese away to the west till the shine of it came,
Flarin' red in the bog-houles, an' bright past the turf-stacks, and in at the door
Of the little ould place down the lonin', that Jack 'ud set fut in no more,
And 'twould dance on their bits of gilt jugs, till they glittered like stars in a row,
And the people widin at their suppers ne'er thinkin' no great while ago
It was dazzlin' Jack's eyes as he looked for me face wid the last of his sight.
And sez I to him, 'What is it, lad?' but I knew I might listen all night

And no answer; the sorra a chance to be bringin'
thim word we 'd ha' found,
On'y Jack had more sinse in him yet than meself
that was hearty and sound;
For he looked towards the rim of the west wid the
sun hangin' ready to fall,
And he whistled two notes quick and low—well I
knew it: the curlew's call.

VII

I 'd not aisy mistake it; sure out on these bogs
scarce a minit goes by,
But anear or afar on the win' comes a flicker of
the crathur's cry—
Faith, I heard wan just thin—and on many a day,
ere the sun 'ud be up,
And around and around stood the grey of the air
like a big empty cup

Fit to hold every sound ever stirred, and to catch
all the light ever shone,
I 'd be out wid me on to our bogland, all desolit
lyin', and lone
As the say whin you 've watched the low shore till
it dips where the ridges rowl green,
And I 'd spy was there e'er a wan out, and belike
not a sowl to be seen
Save Jack whistlin' away to me down be the lough ;
you 'd ha' swore 'twas the bird,
Barrin' just the laste differ ; Jack done it the likest
that ever I heard.
And there 's plenty that thry at it. Seldom a sun-
sit throops out of the west
But some lad 'll be whistlin' his sweetheart, that 's
sittin' and listenin' her best,
While the corners grow dark, and she 's reckonin'
the shadows for 'fraid he might fail.
So his call lit the world like a star. Ne'er a sweet-
heart had Jack, I 'll go bail,

For the truth is his mind was tuk up wid his own folk; it couldn't be tould
The opinion he had and consait of the whole of thim, young wans and ould,
And it 's there where I 'm bothered entirely to think how he got the idee
To go soldierin' off to the ends of the earth wid no comrade but me.
Howanever, he went of a suddint, afore we knew right what was on;
And I thought to meself the ould place 'ud be quare wid Jack Connolly gone,
So I up and I down to the barracks below, an' the shillin' I tuk—
That 's the way it fell out, and belike 'twas himself had the best of the luck.

VIII

And contínted and aisy he went, wanst he saw
he 'd made shift to conthrive
That the message he had in his mind 'ud go safe.
For sez I : 'Man alive,
I 'll be tellin' your people at home the first chance
I can git, good or bad,
How thimselves, and the ould place you quit, was
the last thought that ever you had ;
And I 'll bid thim be thinkin' of you, whin they
hear the bird cry on our bog.
Your poor mother, an' father, an' the childher, an'
their little ould rogue of a dog,
Ne'er a wan you 're forgettin',' sez I ; and bedad
any fool might ha' known,
For the manin' he meant wid his call was as clear
as a bugle blown.

And our rifles wint crack be the gateway, and now
and agin wid a plop
Come a bullet dhruv deep in the sand—'twas the
divil dhrill-sowin' his crop—
And a priest legged it up to the top of the tower,
and stood risin' a yell
For the rest to be sayin' their prayers, like as if
'twas our angely bell.
But it's little Jack heeded; for sure his own folk,
and th' ould counthry, and all
Were come nearer than near, and gone further
than far, along wid that curlew's call.

IX

Ah, but Norah, you're perished an' thrimblin'
wid could, sittin' here in the win';
Did you bring ne'er a wrap to rowl round you,
machree, now the night's closin' in?

For there's mists curlin' white on the pools, and the air gits an edge whin they lift.

Ay, the moon's up, just on'y a breath 'gin the blue, where the cloud comes adrift,

Sthreelin' by like a haystack on fire, wid the flame blowin' off be the way

In bright bundles and wisps, as if some wan 'ud harvest the light of the day.

'Tisn't that fashion dark falls, out there in the aist. Wanst the sun goes on lave,

Ne'er a thrace of a glame bides to show where he passed, like the foam of a wave ;

He 'll be blazin' wan minit, and thin 'tis the same as if somebody shut

A black door on the blink of a hearth, or kicked over a lamp wid his fut.

So the rest of us rode thro' a night blindin' dark, till we 'd half the plain crossed,

And the moon riz ice-clear, wid a shine lyin' thick on the grass as hoar-frost,

You could gather up. And, troth, if our tongues had froze stiff, 'tis as much we 'd ha' said,
Wid Jack Connolly's baste saddle-empty, and jerkin' the reins as I led.
Sure poor Jack had a dale of good-nature; he 'd fooled the ould mare all he could,
And the crathur went slow-fut and heavy; you might think that she understood.

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